

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

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Others in Preparation

CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

By
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JASMIN¹

Monday, 7 July 1851.

THERE is quite a half of France which would laugh if we had the presumption to tell it who Jasmin is, and would reply by reciting some of his poetry and telling a thousand particulars about his poetic life ; but there is another half of France, that of the North, which from time to time needs to be reminded of what has not come out of its midst, of what is not habitually before its eyes and does not directly reach its ears. It is for the benefit of this numerous class of readers that I should like to explain to-day, with more completeness than I was able to do before, what Jasmin, the celebrated poet of Agen, the poet of these days who has best kept all his promises, really is.

Jasmin, born at Agen about the end of the last century, must be a man of about fifty-one years of age, but is full of fire, sap and youth ; with black eyes, hair that a short time ago was of the same colour, a browned complexion, ardent lips, a frank, open, expressive physiognomy. Born poor, in the most honest but the most complete poverty, of a stock in which son followed father to the charity hospital and died there, he[‡] has himself told his childhood's impressions in *Mous Souvenirs Mes Souvenirs*), a little poem full of wit, shrewdness, prightliness and sensibility. In this poem Jasmin displays one of the chief features of his talent : there is sensibility in his gaiety, and, even when he weeps, we always see a ray of sun-light laughing through his tears. Having reached an age when it was necessary to make a living, he became a hair-dresser or barber, and in his neat little shop, in his little saloon on the promenade

¹ *Third volume of his Poems (1851).*

of the Gravier, he sang in obedience to his natural instinct, employing the easy harmony and colour which the happy patois of the South offers to its children. He shaved well, he sang better, and gradually in came customers and others attracted by curiosity, until he, the first of his race, made a comfortable living and was visited, as he puts it, *by a little silvery streamlet*, even acquiring the ownership of his own humble dwelling. Under this first form, Jasmin, the author of pretty songs, of burlesque poems or even of rather elevated odes, those various pieces that were collected and published in 1835 at Agen, with the title : *Papillots (Curl-Papers)*, Jasmin was as yet only a pleasing, graceful and witty poet, born to be an honour to his native town, but he had not conquered the South. After 1836 his talent showed that it was capable of rising to pure, natural, pathetic, disinterested compositions : he published the pretty poem entitled *L'Abuglo de Castel-Cuillé (The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuillé)*, in which are described the fêtes, the joys of the village, and the grief of a young girl who, after being engaged to be married, became blind in consequence of small-pox, and was forsaken by her lover for another. The grief of the poor abandoned girl, her change of colour, her attitude, her speech, her plans, the whole framed in the freshness of spring and the laughing joy surrounding her, bears a stamp of nature and truth to which the masters of poetry alone are able to attain. On seeing this simple picture, one is quite surprised to find oneself involuntarily carried back in memory to other very expressive pictures of the Ancient writers, of Theocritus for example. The truth is that true poetry, drawn from the same sources, meets and reflects the same images.

In rising to this new kind of composition, Jasmin was no doubt still following his natural bent, but he began to direct it, to perfect it ; this man, who had read few books, had meditated while reading the book of the heart and of nature, and he entered into the way of true art, where a secret and persevering labour governs what might appear at most an eloquent facility and a happy invention. In 1834, he had been greatly impressed by a circumstance which determined his future poetic method, and which he shall tell in his own words. A fire broke out during the night at Agen. A young fellow

of the lower class, who was half educated but possessed of some natural gifts, was witness of a heart-rending scene and, as Jasmin and some of his friends arrived on the spot, related it to them while still in a state of great excitement :

" I shall never forget it, says Jasmin, he made us shudder, he made us weep. . . . He was Corneille, he was Talma ! I spoke of it next day in some of the best houses in Agen ; the people wanted to see the young fellow, they sent for him and made him repeat his story ; but the fever of excitement was extinguished in him, he was just *worfy, affected, exaggerated* ; in short, *he wished to do, and he did not*. Then I understood that, speaking and acting in our moments of emotion and excitement, we are all laconic and eloquent, full of spirit and action, true poets in short *when we are not conscious of it* ; and I also understood that a Muse might, by dint of labour and patience, attain to all that *consciously*."

This just and delicate observation should help to explain Jasmin's method in composing the different poems that appeared since : *The Blind Girl* (1835), then *Françouette* (1840), *Mal Martha* (1844), *The Two Twin-brothers* (1845), *A Son's Week* (1849). In all these compositions Jasmin has a natural, pathetic idea ; it is a story, either of his own invention, or borrowed from the tradition of the neighbourhood. With his facility in improvising, aided by the resources of the patois in which he writes, Jasmin might hasten his pen and count upon the chances of a happy invention, such as never fails a man of verve and talent : but no, he marks out his frame, he draws his outline, he brings his characters into action, then he seeks to discover all their thoughts, all their simplest and most vigorous words, and to clothe them in the most artless, the most faithful, the most transparent language, a true, eloquent and *sober* language ; do not forget this last quality. He is never happier than when he hears and is able to borrow from an artisan or a farm labourer one of those words *which are worth ten*. Thus are his poems made to mature for years before they are brought to the light of day, in accordance with the precept of Horace which Jasmin rediscovered by his own experience, and thus did this poet of the people, writing in a popular dialect and for public solemnities which recall those of the Middle Age and of Greece, find himself to be finally, more than any of our contemporaries, of the school of Horace whom I have just mentioned, of the school of Theocritus, of the school of Gray and of

all those charming and studious men of genius who in every work aim at perfection.

When I find carried to such a degree in Jasmin this theory of labour, of carefulness in style and composition, when he had moreover so ready and facile an inspiration, how painful it is to remember how our poetic wealth has been so squandered by our great poets of the day! O *Jocelyn!* *Jocelyn!* what a delightful poem you might have been, if the prodigal nature which conceived you had been capable of bearing you with the same patience, of rearing you and bringing you to a happy issue with the same maternal solicitude! It is true that a poem like *Jocelyn*, executed and treated with the care that Jasmin brings to his work, would cost eight or ten years of a man's life, and he would not have much time to produce withal a dozen volumes on the Girondists or the Jacobins, and a February Revolution, to be an actor and a chronicler at the same time, and to write all that series of impromptu works that we know and forget, or that we should like to forget.

Jasmin expressed very charmingly and wittily on a singular occasion his elevated and sober conception of the poet's art. During one of those tours which he has been making the last sixteen years in the South, and which were a continual succession of recitations and ovations, a poet of the Department of the Hérault, a dialect poet called Peyrottes, a potter by trade, who had gained a sort of reputation, but a long way behind Jasmin, sent him by letter a challenge. Jasmin was then passing through Montpellier :

'Sir, wrote Peyrottes to him (24 December 1847). I presume, in my temerity which borders on boldness (I do not hold Peyrottes to be very strong on synonymous),¹ to propose to you a match. Would you be so good as to accept it? In the Middle Age the troubadours would not have disclaimed the challenge which in my boldness, I am sending you.

'I will go to Montpellier on any day and at any hour you please to mention. We will appoint four persons well known in literature to

¹ M. Peyrottes has written to me to protest against this slight sarcasm; he tells me that the *Echo du Midi*, which printed his letter, here made a blunder of which he was not capable, and that he used these words: 'I presume in my timidity which borders on audacity. . .' I acknowledge his *Errata*, although they do not take away from the piquancy of the episode in which he figures, and from the literary moral which I wish to draw.

* give us three themes to treat in twenty-four hours. We will both be locked up. A sentry will guard the door. Only provisions will be admitted.

'A son of the Hérault, I stand up for the honour and glory of my country! As, under the circumstances, a charitable action is de rigueur, we will have the three given subjects printed for the benefit of the Crèche at Montpellier.

'I should much like to enter the lists with you in declamation, but a very pronounced impediment of speech forbids my doing so.'

And in a Postscript to this challenging letter he added :

'I forewarn you, Sir, that I am already having copies of this letter distributed among various persons at Montpellier.'

Here we see Jasmin called upon to improvise, and almost obliged, as a matter of honour, to do so. Will he accept the challenge? Listen to his charming reply and to the lesson which is addressed to others besides the potter-poet :

'Sir,

'I received only the day before yesterday, on the eve of my departure, your *poetic cartel*: but I may tell you that, though I had received it at a more opportune time, I could not have accepted it.

'How! Sir, you propose to my Muse, who so greatly loves the open air and her freedom, to shut herself up in a close chamber, guarded by four sentries who will admit nothing but provisions, and there to treat three given themes, in twenty-four hours! . . . Three themes in twenty-four hours! you make me shudder, Sir. In the peril in which you wish to place my Muse, I confess to you, in all humility, that she is so *native* as to have become enamoured of the *antique manner of execution*, to the extent of being unable to grant me more than two or three lines a day. My five poems: *The Blind Girl*, *My Souvenirs*, *Françounette*, *Mad Martha*, *The Two Twins*, cost me twelve years of labour, and yet they amount altogether to no more than two thousand four hundred lines.

'The chances, as you see, would not be equal; our two Muses would no sooner have been imprisoned, when yours might have ended her triple job before mine, poor thing, had found her first inspiration to order.

'I do not presume then to enter the lists with you; the courser that laboriously drags its chariot, but reaches its destination all the same, cannot vie with the mettlesome locomotive on the railway. The art that produces lines one by one cannot compete with the factory.

'Therefore, my Muse declares herself vanquished beforehand, and I authorise you to have my declaration registered.

'I have the honour, Sir, to salute you.

'JACQUES JASMIN.'

'P.S.—Now that you know the Muse, in two words know the man:

'I love glory, but never has the success of others disturbed my slumbers.'

Thus did Jasmin reply at once like a child of nature, and as a disciple of Horace and Theocritus might have done.

We must begin to quote him, to translate him in such a way as to enable all to appreciate some of his peculiar qualities. His third volume of Poems, which is on the point of appearing, provides me with many a subject either in the style of the Epistle, or that of the Poem. I will take as an example, by preference, *Maltro l'Innocento (Mad Martha)*. It is a little poem dedicated to Mme Mennessier-Nodier, in memory and in recognition of the fact that Nodier was the first to salute and proclaim Jasmin on this side of the Loire. Martha was a poor girl who lived for thirty years in Agen on public charity, 'and whom we little rascals, says the poet, used to tease with impunity when she came out of her house to fill her little empty basket.—For thirty years the poor half-witted creature was seen, often holding out her hands to our charity. When she passed by, the people in Agen would say : *Martha has come out, she must be hungry!* Nothing was known about her, and yet everybody liked her. Only the children, who have pity on nothing and laugh at everything sad, would shout : *Martha, a soldier!* and Martha, who had a horror of soldiers, would run away quickly.'—Why did she run away ? That is what Jasmin's Muse asked herself one day, in a moment of reverie when the image of this poor girl, with her virginal grace under her rags, recurred to her thoughts, and, after going about the country in search of information, after making full enquiries *through vines and daisies*, she found out the following :

One day, near the banks which the river Lot freshly kisses with its clear and pure waters, in a little cottage hidden by thick elm-trees, while the young fellows were drawing lots in the neighbouring town, a young girl was thinking, then praying, then getting up, unable to stay in one place. What was her trouble ? So young, so beautiful, of a beauty so pure and delicate among her companions, what was the cause of her anxiety, her sudden changes of colour ? You will have guessed it : on that day her lot and that of another is decided. Some one enters at this moment : 'it is Annette, her neighbour ; at the first glance it is evident that she too has a heart's trouble : a moment after one has a suspicion that in her case the pain glides over the heart, and does not take root.' And the two girls speak of their troubles, but each

in her own way. Annette, frightened at her friend's anxiety, says to Martha who had questioned her, and thought she read the news in her face : ' I know nothing as yet ; take courage, dear ; it is noon, we shall know it soon. But you are trembling like a reed ! Your face frightens me ! and if Jacques were to depart, you would die perhaps ? — ' *I do not know,*' replies Martha with deep simplicity. Annette comforts her ; with naïve and malicious levity she exhorts her to follow her own example : ' What are you thinking of ? die ! what a child you are ! I love Joseph ; if he departs, I may grieve, I may let fall a few tears ; but come, though I do love him, I will wait for his return, and not think of dying. No man ever dies for a girl, and they are quite right ; it is only too true : *nobody loses more than the one who goes away.*' Imagine a sweet and easy rhythm to these simple words. Thus does Jasmin compose his dialogues and discover, by dint of reflexion, nature in all its purity. To divert their minds from anxiety and drive away their troubles by occupation, the girls try their fortune with a pack of cards. The game is described with charm and vivacity. Superstition is painted in natural colours. The two girls, the *loving* and the *light-hearted* one, follow the game with the same curious and frightened interest : ' The two mouths are mute ; the four laughing, frightened eyes follow the movements of the fingers.' All went well, the cards were promising, nearly all the spades were out, when the fatal *queen of spades* turned up last of all and exclaimed : *Woe !* At the same instant the sound of the drum and fifes proclaims the joyous return of the boys, of those who have drawn lucky numbers. Which of the two girls will recognise her lover ? It is Annette, the light-hearted, the least in love, who recognises Joseph among the favoured ones. Jacques has drawn number 3, and must go. Two weeks later Annette, the one who would have found comfort, is married to her lover. Jacques comes in tears to take leave of Martha. Jacques has neither father nor mother ; he has nobody but her in the world to love. He promises, if the war spares him, to return and bring her back his life. We have only reached the end of the first canto, or, as they say, the first *pause*. The month of May has come round again ; the poet describes it as every Southern poet knows how

to describe it. In the midst of the universal joy and the songs in nature, a single and very gentle voice is heard to complain. It is the voice of Martha singing a lovely lament, of which I quote the first verse :

' The swallows have returned, I see my two on the nest, up there ; they have not been parted, like us two ! They have come down, here they are, I can almost put my hand on them ; how pretty and glossy they are ! They still have the ribbon that Jacques tied round their neck on my fête-day, last year, when they came and pecked from our joined hands the golden gnats we chose for them.'

In order to give an idea of this poetry, beaming and scintillating still in the midst of its melancholy, I should have to quote the original text. Jasmin's poetry is quite enamelled with those charming lines which make the objects to shine before our eyes, which make the morning sun glisten on the window-pane, and the little cottage sparkle through the cluster of hazel-bushes : but here the brilliancy of the description is blended with pure sentiment.

Poor Martha continues her laments and her conversation with the swallows. She is wasting away, however, she is being consumed by a slow fever ; she is dying, and soon the priest recommends her to the prayers of the congregation. Then a kind uncle divines her trouble, and at her bedside makes a proposal which arouses her and restores her to health. Her uncle has understood that she is pining for Jacques : he sells his vineyard and with this sum to start with Martha, if she recovers and works hard, will soon have the means of buying her soldier's discharge. Martha hopes, she revives, she works. But her uncle dies : she is not disheartened. She sells her cottage, and with a light heart hastens to carry the complete sum to the priest :

' Monsieur le Curé, says Martha on her knees, I bring you all I have ; now you can write ; buy his freedom, as you are so kind to me ; do not say that it is I who am saving him ; oh ! he will guess soon enough ; do not mention me yet, and do not fear for me : I have strength in my arms, I will work for my living . pity ! Monsieur le Curé, have pity ! give him back to me.'

The third part begins. It is only a question of finding Jacques. It is not an easy thing in that time of great wars. The country priest knows many things about his flock ; he can read hearts. A sinner avoids him, he

knows it, and he goes in search of him. 'But, from his presbytery, the man of Heaven would have found it an easier task to bring to light sin, wicked thoughts, than to find the nameless soldier in the midst of an army, and one who had not written for three years.' However the good Curé will succeed. In the meanwhile Martha, poor, but almost happy already and trustful, works hard. She labours night and day to make up as far as she is able the sum she has given, and to have more to give. And the news of her pathetic action becoming known in the neighbourhood, all the country is in love with her : 'At night, there were long serenades, garlands of flowers hung at her door, and in the day-time, choice gifts which the girls, at length won over to her cause, presented to her with friendly looks.' Annette was at the head of this band of kind maidens. In short, Martha was already treated as if she were a betrothed, a bride, when one day, a Sunday morning, the good Curé appears to her after mass, with a paper in his hand. It is a letter from Jacques ; he has been found, he is free, he will arrive on the following Sunday. It must be added that Jacques has not guessed the source of his unexpected good fortune. A poor orphan boy, or, what is worse, a foundling, he imagines that it is his mother who has at length made herself known. So he will come and learn everything at once : all the happy surprises will come together. A week passes : the next Sunday has come. After mass, all the village is assembled as if they were awaiting a great lord, and Martha, the maiden with the unspotted brow, stands beside the old priest, all laughing and standing at the head of the road : you see the picture, and the high road stretching out before you in all its length :

'Nothing in the middle, nothing at the end of that long level strip, nothing but the shadow torn in pieces by the sun (another of those happy lines which paint without any interruption). Suddenly a dark point has grown bigger : it is stirring. . . . Two men . . . two soldiers. . . . The taller, that is he ! . . . How fine he looks ! He has grown taller in the army. . . . And they both come nearer. . . . But who is the other ? He looks like a woman . . . Ah ! it is a woman, a stranger. How handsome she is, and how graceful ! she is dressed as a vivandière. A woman, good heavens ! with Jacques ! Where is she going to ? Martha has her eyes upon them, sad and pale as death ; and even the priest, even the bystanders, all are shuddering, all are dumb ; the two come still nearer. . . . Here they are, twenty yards away, smiling, out of breath. But what is this ? Jacques looks troubled, he has seen Martha. . . . Trembling, shame-faced, he has stopped. . . . The priest can

hold out no longer : with his strong, full voice, which is a terror to all : " Jacques, who is that woman ? " And, like a culprit, Jacques with hanging head : " It is my wife, Monsieur le Curé . . . I am married." A woman's cry is heard, the priest turns round. . . ."

We feel that this cry comes from Martha : but do not suppose that she weeps or sighs. The poor girl, with her eyes fixed on Jacques, breaks out into laughter, convulsive laughter. She is mad and will never recover.— Such is in an abridged form the story out of which the poet has succeeded in making a series of vivid, feeling and pathetic scenes.

The language which Jasmin employs is the patois of the South ; but the word is very vague and can give no correct idea of his sweet speech and the artistic labour with which he has restored it. The language of Southern France, the most precocious of those which were born of Latin after the confusion of barbarism, that language called the Provincial-Roman (*provençale-romane*) had attained a kind of classic perfection during the twelfth century, from 1120 to 1200 ; it had produced some varied and most distinguished works in poetry, and was in full bloom when it was violently laid waste and ravaged at the beginning of the thirteenth century, in the so-called War of the Albigenses (1208-1229). It was brutally crushed in its flower, and drowned so to say in the blood of those who cultivated it. For some time it still struggled and tried to maintain itself in the state of a literary language ; but, every political centre having been destroyed in the South, this language, the first born or at least the first *formed* of the modern languages, fell into a decided decline and passed into the state of a patois. A patois I define as *an ancient language which has had misfortunes*, or on the other hand a quite young language that has not yet made its fortune. The Provençal was in the former case. Since then, this scattered and broken-up language still had its particular poets in Béarn, at Toulouse, in the Rouergue, in different places ; but these poets with their easy naturalness made no effort to rise above the spirit of the soil, and to broaden the quite local horizon within which they had been confined by Fortune. Jasmin, in the second part of his career, had the honour and the merit of feeling that it was necessary, for the whole of the South, to return to a sort of speech-unity, at

least in respect of the language of poetry. When he first came out with his Agen patois, he found a language that was harmonious still, but very largely encroached upon by French invasions, by words and expressions which were contrary to its primitive genius. He was obliged to put away his first habits, to rid the surface of the stone, as he expresses himself, of the foreign strata which two centuries of civilisation had left upon it. He succeeded in his task with delicacy and without any apparent effort. The language which he speaks to-day, the language in which he sings, does not belong to any place in particular, to any corner of Gascony, Languedoc or Provence ; it is a slightly artificial and perfectly natural language, which is equally understood in every district and even by the Catalonians. He discreetly introduces into it picturesque words of his own invention, diminutives, old-fashioned words that he has renovated, a thousand combinations and a thousand beauties of which we ourselves were formerly not entirely destitute in the French of Amyot and Montaigne, but of which classical regularity has deprived us. Jasmin possesses and uses them in his pretty and well-restored dialect, but he never abuses them.

It is for the critics beyond the Loire to follow more in detail this study of Jasmin's language and of the interesting questions attaching to it. In respect of style Jasmin appears to me a sort of *Languedocian Manzoni*. I give the definition for what it is worth to those who are competent to judge, and leave it to them to evolve or to modify it. What I should especially like to do here, is to show the man at work and in action. There is in Jasmin, beside the poet, a reciter and an actor, and all three characters combine, with the aid of his harmonious dialect, to procure him that prodigious influence which he exercises on the Southern temperament. It would be difficult and unjust to assign the larger share in this success to one of the elements rather than to another : they are all equally necessary and interdependent. What causes Jasmin's poetry to produce so great an effect, is that everything in him is in harmony, everything flows from the source : we feel that the man and the poet are one ; and, as the man is on a level with the poet, one soon abandons oneself when listening to him, to the sincerity of the impression which he shares.

We will leave aside the impromptu poems and the compliments in madrigal form that he is obliged to scatter on his path, in return for each homage and each triumphal hospitality that he receives ; he criticises himself on this point as severely as anybody could do, and when his gratitude is serious, he demands time and reflexion to express it : 'One cannot, he says, pay a poetic debt with impromptus ; impromptus may be the good coin of the heart, but they are almost always the bad coin of poetry.' Let us then consider Jasmin from his charming and serious, from his wholly enduring sides. One of the most touching, the most honourable and the most characteristic episodes of his existence as a poet-troubadour, is his pilgrimage for the benefit of the church of Vergt. The worthy Curé of a little town of Périgord, M. Masson, seeing his church in ruins and the fervour of his flock suffering in consequence, applied to Jasmin in 1843 to solicit his aid, on one of his rounds, in collecting subscriptions. Jasmin needed no entreaty : 'The Church was waiting for me, he says, her priest chose me ; I started on a *galloping tour*.' So we see him, a pilgrim by the side of the priest, hastening from town to town. Oh ! how he would wish that his poetry, like that of the celebrated singer of antiquity (for Jasmin has heard a little about Amphion), were able quickly to make walls and roofs to rise ! Do not imagine however that, when the steeple is erected, he is going to compare himself proudly with that famous bard :

'No ! when tiles and rafters mount up, my soul will feel something sweeter. I shall say to myself : I was naked ; the Church, I remind myself, clothed me very often when I was little. A man, I find her naked ; in my turn I cover her. . . . Oh ! give, give, all ! let me taste the delight of doing for her once what she has so often done for me.'

On hearing these sincere lines, every one gave with tears, and the poet swam in the joy of his heart to see the Curé's hat filling on his round.

Five months after this first collection, on the 24 July 1843, the church of Vergt, for which he had travelled so much, was blessed and consecrated by six bishops in the presence of three hundred priests and more than fifteen thousand people of all ranks, gathered together for the ceremony. Jasmin was there, a little lost in the crowd at first. For this solemnity he had composed a

new poem, entitled *The Priest without a Church*, and inspired by the same lofty and honest feelings. In this poem he described the influence of a handsome church on the Southern people, who love to imagine the heaven to be open while they are still on earth, and whose piety depends a little on outward show. The whole day however was taken up with religious ceremonies ; dinner had to be taken in haste. At the moment of sitting down to table, the Archbishop of Rheims (Cardinal Gousset), the consecrator of the rebuilt church, said to Jasmin : ' Poet, we have been told of your poem on the occasion ; we shall be happy if you will confide it to some of us this evening, before we depart.' — ' To some, Monseigneur ! replied Jasmin. Can you imagine that a Muse has laboured fifteen days and fifteen nights for a confidential reading on the day of the festival ? To-day is the festival at Vergt for religion, but also for poetry that understands and loves it. The Church has six pontiffs, poetry has but one sub-deacon, but he must sing his hymn officially, or he will carry it away a virgin, unheard by any man.' The Archbishop, a man of wit, who understands the race of poets, promises to try during dessert to introduce the piece of poetry between the cheese and the coffee : ' But you will have a strong rival in the coffee ! ' — ' He shall be vanquished, Monseigneur,' replies Jasmin. They were at dessert, there was not a moment to lose, and the two hundred and fifty guests were about to escape. The Bishop of Tulle, M. Berteaud, who was to preach the consecration sermon, had already slipped out to prepare his discourse ; he is called back. Jasmin begins and recites the poem, which may be read in his third volume : *Lou Prête sans Glèzyo (The Priest without a Church)*. A single fact will show its success better than anything. M. Berteaud who was to preach an hour later on the *infinity of God*, after hearing the poet, suddenly changed his text ; he announced at the beginning of his sermon that he was going to preach on the *priest without a church*, and to develop the subject so happily indicated by another. Such examples, in which so many delicate and generous sentiments blend on both sides in a superior religious sentiment, seem to bring poetry back to its noblest origins and cannot be told without emotion.

The life of Jasmin, that gay and laughing poet, is

filled with these grave and touching incidents. In 1840, on his visit to Toulouse, where he had first won his envied title of universal poet of all Languedoc, he had seen a young and at that time rich lady, Mlle Thérèse Roaldès, ' wed her rich music to his poor songs.' Three years after, her family had suffered misfortune, and Mlle Roaldès was obliged, through filial piety, to seek a living by her talent. Jasmin acted towards her as he had done to the priest of Vergt ; he made some successful and lucrative tours, and the very enthusiasm of the poet, who seemed happy before everything to recite his poetry, was in this case an additional piece of delicacy.

We may imagine that Jasmin's tours were distinguished by humorous, absurd, enthusiastic, quite Gascon incidents : the former leap to the eye at once ; I have preferred to dwell on the others.

Those serious and dignified qualities, covered over with a fresh poetry, full of gaiety and sensibility, turned to Jasmin's profit. As a man, they procured him a consideration which does not always accompany fame ; as a poet, they brought him back to the perfection of his talent and to good taste, to that natural good taste, which follows a perfect and confident use of all one's commendable faculties. Among those familiar poems in the style of the Epistle and the Idyll, I know of none that paints him better than that which is entitled : *Ma Bigno (My Vineyard)*, addressed to a lady compatriot who was living in Paris. On a certain day about the year 1845, Jasmin became the actual proprietor, not only of his house on the Gravier, but also of a little vineyard quite near the town, which he immediately baptised with this inscription : *A Papillote*, or, as who should say, *The Bagatelle, The Knick-Knack*. This vineyard combined all the conditions that Pliny the Younger required for the little property of a poet and a student : *Tantum soli ut . . . reptare per limitem . . . omnes viticulas suas nosse et numerare arbusculas possint*. The vine-stocks could be easily counted :

' Nine cherry-trees, that is my wood, exclaims Jasmin, who has read neither Pliny the Younger, nor the *Hoc erat in votis* of Horace, nor Claudian's *Old Mar of Verona* ; ten rows of vines form my promenade ; peach-trees, they are mine ; hazel-bushes, they are mine ; young elms, I have two of them ; fountains, I have two of them. How wealthy I

am? My Muse is a small farmer; oh! I will paint you, while I hold the brush, our country loved of heaven.

'Here, we grow everything by merely scratching the soil; the man who possesses a small piece of it can swagger like any land-owner; there are no little properties under our sun!'

Then follow the prettiest, the most tuneful, the most balmy of descriptions: but the moral is never absent. The poet relies upon this vineyard to prevent his friends from escaping him, to attach them anew with his tasty fruit. In this place recollections crowd upon him.

'I can see the meadow where I used to sport; I can see the little island where I gathered sticks, where I have cried . . . , where I have laughed. . . .

'I can see beyond the leafy wood, where, near the spring, I became dreamy, after I had been told that a famous writer had gilded the brow of Agen, by reciting his verse to the murmurs of this silvery stream.'

Can you believe it? this famous writer who troubled Jasmin's boyhood, is Scaliger. Julius-Cæsar Scaliger, who was the glory of Agen in the sixteenth century, and whom tradition and legend have turned into an almost popular poet. Illustrious Scaliger, he was never so charmingly sung and celebrated. But, from one memory to another, Jasmin perceives, on his own little estate, more than one thick hedge through which he had forced his way as a boy, more than one apple-tree that he had lopped, more than one vine-trellis to which he had climbed upon another's back in order to reach the choice muscats, and he resolves, in his turn, not to deal with the boys more hardly than he was dealt with:

'What can you expect? what I pilfered, I will give back, and I will give back with usury; there is no door to my vineyard; the threshold is barred by two brambles; when I see the nose of the marauder through the opening, instead of arming myself with a switch, I will turn away, that they may come back.'

See how kind-heartedness and charity are disguised in laughter. Jasmin's *Vineyard* is one of those little master-pieces that we can only expect from one of those accomplished poets in whom sentiment and style unite to satisfy both the soul and good taste.

What else is there to say of the serious side of the poet? Shall we make it a merit that he was able to resist all the evil temptations which did not fail to besiege him?

No poet ever received so many eulogies as he, and none tries less to appear not to love them, but he is singular in that he has never been led by these praises to commit any folly : he has carried his poet's intoxication with a rare good sense : 'I know of no slip that he has ever made,' somebody said to me who knows him well. Before the February Revolution, in April 1847, in the poem entitled *Rich and Poor, or The Lying Prophets*, he showed the charity of the former disarming the anger and envy of the latter, and belying sinister predictions ; he showed the poorest that charity was better understood than ever, extending its operations on all sides, giving with one hand and collecting with the other ; and to the rich he said : 'Do not forget for a single moment that the great brood of the poor always wake up with laughter, when they have not gone to bed hungry.' In his poem *Town and Country*, composed for the festival of the Comice-Agricole (Agricultural Society) of Villeneuve-sur-Lot (September 1849), he pointed out the advantages of not deserting one's native soil for the vanities and ambitions of the towns ; he made the wisest and the oldest propose a toast, 'not to the *new spirit*, full of venom, but to the elder brother of the spirit, *good sense*.' He was not content until he had brought back to the fields his misguided young *Gentleman*, and had made him say : 'The country was my cradle, now it shall be my grave : for I have understood the land, I have sounded its worth.' This young man, misguided by modern ideas, might no doubt be characterised more particularly and with a greater resemblance in his moral malady : the intention however suffices ; the hearer will complete the idea. Happy in the conversion, the poet exclaims at the finish, with a feeling that overflows the frame of his poem : 'It is a fine thing to save sacred poetry, but it is a hundred times finer to save one's country !'—It was after hearing this poem and so many others inspired by the same exalted moral sentiment, that somebody said with reason : 'If France possessed ten poets like Jasmin, ten poets of his influence, she need fear no revolutions.'

I was nearly forgetting to say that this third volume of Jasmin's works is dedicated to M. Dumon of Agen, the ex-Minister, who had once paid him a thousand attentions and done him a thousand kind deeds. He is certainly

not committing himself in dedicating a volume of poetry to M. Dumon, a man of such intelligence and literary attainments : but he does himself honour and chooses his time well when he says to-day before all the world : *I feel as grateful to you as ever.*

MARIE-ANTOINETTE¹

Monday, 14 July 1851.

AMONG the writings which enable us to form a correct idea of Queen Marie-Antoinette and her character in the years of her prosperity and youth, I know of none that brings more conviction to the mind of the reader than the simple Notice of the Count of La Marck, inserted by M. de Bacourt in the Introduction to the work recently published on Mirabeau. The Count of La Marck outlines the private life of the Queen in a few pages which show very clear observation. We see there a real and natural Marie-Antoinette, without any exaggeration. We foresee the mistakes into which those about her will not fail to urge her, those that will be attributed to her, and the weapons that she will unconsciously put into the hands of malignity. We regret that so impartial and so superior an observer did not draw a similar portrait of the Queen at the different moments of her existence, until the hour when she became a great victim, and when the lofty qualities of her heart burst forth with such brilliance as to strike and interest all who are possessed of any humanity.

There is a way of regarding Marie-Antoinette which appears to me the true one, and which I should like to define, because it is from this point of view that the final judgment of history should, in my opinion, be given. One may, with an exalted feeling of compassion, take an ideal interest in Marie-Antoinette, try to defend her on all points, set up as her advocate, her champion against all comers, feel indignant at the very idea of blemishes and weaknesses that others think they discover in her life: that is an attitude which is worthy of respect if it is sincere, which is very conceivable in those who had a

¹ Notice of the Count of La Marck.

cult for the old monarchy, but which impresses me much less in new-comers, in whom it is no more than a foregone conclusion. That is not my point of view ; it could hardly be that of men who have never been brought up in the religion of the old monarchy, and such, it cannot but be admitted, is the case with the vast majority among the present and the coming generations. What appears to be more certain and more desirable for the pathetic memory of Marie-Antoinette, is that she will stand out, from the multitude of writings and testimonies of which she has formed the subject, a beautiful, noble and gracious figure, with her weaknesses, her frivolities, her frailties perhaps, but with the essential qualities, preserved and recovered in their integrity, of a woman, of a mother and at times of a queen, with her at all times generous goodness, and finally with those merits of resignation, courage and meekness which crown great misfortunes. It is by reason of these qualities that, once historically established in those still beautiful proportions, she will continue to interest throughout the ages all those men who, becoming more and more indifferent to the political forms of the past, still entertain the feelings of delicacy and humanity which form part of civilisation as well as of nature, of all those are able to sympathise with the misfortunes of a Hecuba and an Andromache, and who, reading the story of like and still greater misfortunes, are touched by hers.

But there is this difference that poetry alone is charged with the tradition of Andromache and Hecuba, and that we have no Memoirs of the Court of Priam, whilst we have those of the Court of Louis XVI, and there is no possibility of disregarding them. What do these Memoirs say about Marie-Antoinette ? I mean the true and not the libellous Memoirs. What says the Count of La Marck, who sums up very justly the spirit of that first epoch ? Coming to France at the age of fifteen years, the young Dauphiness was not yet nineteen when she found herself a Queen by the side of Louis XVI. That prince, furnished with a sound education and endowed with all the moral qualities we know of, but weak, timid, abrupt, rude, and particularly ungracious with women, had none of the qualities necessary for guiding his young wife. The latter, the daughter of an illustrious mother, Maria-

Theresa, who was too much occupied with State affairs to give any attention to her bringing-up, had had a very neglected early education at Vienna. She had never been inspired with a taste for serious reading, and had no idea of acquiring it. Her mind, quick and clear enough, 'promptly grasped and comprehended the things that were spoken of,' but had neither great breadth nor great capacity, nothing in a word that could make up for the want of education or supply the place of experience. With amiability, gaiety and innocent banter, she had above all 'great goodness of heart and a persevering desire to oblige the persons who addressed themselves to her.' She felt a great need for friendship and intimacy, and she at once sought some person to whom she might become attached in a way that is not usual at Court. Her ideal of happiness (everybody has his own ideal) evidently was to find, on leaving the scenes of ceremony which bored her, a pleasant, cheerful, devoted, choice society, in the midst of which she might appear to forget that she was a queen, whilst being really mindful of it. She liked, if we may say so, to indulge in the pleasure of this oblivion, only to remember suddenly what she was, in order to be able to scatter good graces around her. We have seen, in comic operas and pastoral plays, those disguised queens who are the joy and the delight of those about her. Marie-Antoinette had that ideal of a happy life which she might have realised without any difficulties if she had remained a mere Archduchess at Vienna, or if she had simply reigned in some little Tuscany or Lorraine. But, in France, she could not attempt that life with impunity, and her little Trianon with its dairies, its sheepfolds and its comedies, was too near to Versailles. Envy prowled around those too favoured spots, envy making signals to stupidity and calumny.

M. de La Marck pointed out very clearly how improper it was for a queen to restrict herself so exclusively at first to the circle of the Comtesse Julie de Polignac, to give to the latter, together with the rank of a friend, the attitude of a favourite, and to all the men of this coterie (the Vaudreuil, the Besenval, the Adhémars), pretensions and rights which they so quickly abused, each in the direction of his humour and his ambition. Although she never became fully aware of these improprieties, she

had some inkling of them ; she felt that where she sought repose and relaxation from her supreme rank, she still met with an obsession that was prompted by self-interest, and when it was pointed out to her that she often showed too great a preference to strangers of distinction passing through France, a preference that might prejudice her in the eyes of the French : ' You are right, she would reply sadly, but they at least do not ask anything of me.'

Some of the men who, admitted to the Queen's intimacy and favour, were under greater obligations of gratitude and respect, were the first to speak of her with levity, because they found her not sufficiently docile to their views. As she appeared, at a certain moment, to become a little estranged to the Polignac circle and to feel more at home in the salon of Mme d'Ossun, her Lady of the Bedchamber, ' an habitué of the Polignac salon (whom M. de La Marck does not name, but who appears to have been one of the most important of the circle) wrote a very spiteful little poem against the Queen, and this poem, which was based on an infamous falsehood, circulated in Paris.' Thus it was that the Court itself and the Queen's intimates provided the first leaven which mingled with the scurribilities and infamies of the outside world. She herself was ignorant of all that, and had no more suspicion of the influences that were at work against her popularity at Versailles, than of those which caused her estrangement at Paris.

Even to-day, when anybody wishes to quote some testimony that reflects against Marie-Antoinette, the testimony of somebody who counts, he goes to the *Memoirs* of the Baron de Besenval. Summoned to her in 1778, at the time of the duel of the Comte d'Artois and the Duc de Bourbon, M. de Besenval is introduced by Campan (Secretary of the Cabinet) into a private chamber that he did not know, ' simply but comfortably furnished.—I was astonished, he adds in passing, not that the Queen should have desired so many comforts, but that she should have dared to procure them.' This simple sentence, thrown out cursorily, is full of insinuations, and her enemies did not fail to take note of it.

I will not affect more reserve than necessary, or fear to touch upon the most delicate point. There are people who make it their concern to deny absolutely any kind of

light conduct and any weakness of the heart in Marie-Antoinette (supposing that she had any at that period of her life). For my part, I boldly think that the interest attaching to her memory, that the pity excited by her misfortune and the noble way in which she bore it, that the execration which her judges and her executioners deserve, can in no respect depend upon any previous discovery, relating to a feminine frailty, or be in the slightest degree weakened by it. Now, at the present day, with the historical information at our command on Marie-Antoinette, taking true testimony into account, and remembering what has been related by sufficiently well informed contemporaries, we are justified in thinking that this warm-hearted and vivacious lady, yielding entirely to her impressions, with her liking for refined manners and chivalric observances, and her simple need for opening her heart and seeking protection, may have had a preference in her heart during these fifteen years of her youth: it would have been strange if that had not been the case. Many men of ambition, many coxcombs however, tried their fortune and failed; there were numberless attempts and beginnings. We heard Lauzun the other day explaining his adventure in his own way: it remains a fact that, for some reason or other, he failed. The Prince de Ligne often came to France at this period, and was one of those quite French and very amiable foreigners in whose company the Queen took a particular pleasure. He had the honour of riding out with her in the mornings: 'It was, he said, during these rides, when I was quite alone with the Queen, although surrounded by her ostentatious royal train, that she related to me a thousand interesting anecdotes concerning herself, and told me of the traps that had been set to make her fall in love. Now it was the house of Noailles who tried to make her take the Vicomte, now the Choiseul cabal who intended her to fall in love with Biron (Lauzun), *who, since! . . . but at that time he was virtuous.* The Duchesse de Duras accompanied us on horseback, when it was her week; but we used to leave her with the grooms, and that was one of the Queen's giddy acts and one of her greatest crimes, since she committed no others but those of neglect of the bores, male and female, and they are always *inflacable.*' So here we

have the other side of Lauzun's story, the Queen's version. I must remark however that it was by no means likely that Lauzun was acting in the interests of the Choiseul cabal, with whom he was at all times on rather bad terms ; but those about the Queen had an interest in presenting him in that light, in order finally to ruin him.

It was the same Prince de Ligne who said of her in another place : ' Her supposed gallantry was never more than a deep feeling of friendship, which perhaps distinguished one or two persons (I leave him his grand seigneur's style), and a coquettish desire, common to women and queens, to please all the world.' This impression or this conjecture, which I find again in other good observers who came in contact with Marie-Antoinette, remains, I think, the most probable one. These two persons whom she particularly distinguished at different times, appear to have been the Duc de Coigny, in the first place, a prudent man and no longer young, and lastly M. de Fersen, a Colonel in the Royal - Swedish regiment in French service, a man of an elevated, chivalrous character, who, in the days of misfortune, betrayed himself only by his absolute devotion.

By the way, when discussing these intimate and secret particulars on which it is so easy to find abundance of gossip and so difficult to acquire any certainty, it is well, I think, to remember the sensible words of Mme de Lassay (a natural daughter of a Condé) to her husband when he was minutely discussing and deciding the question of Mme de Maintenon's virtue : she looked at him with astonishment and said with an admirable sang-froid : ' How do you come, Sir, to be so sure of these things ? ' These words, which are piquant when addressed by a wife to her husband who thinks he is sure about a disputed virtue, are no less true in all cases, and might be equally well addressed to anybody who thinks he is so sure about the kind of fault which nobody ever witnesses.¹

¹ MM. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, in their *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette* (1858), in which they have given us so many curious unpublished documents, intermingled with some brilliant and generous remarks, vigorously pronounce against any kind of supposition and concession on this head : ' No, they exclaim, Marie-Antoinette has no need of any excuse ; no, calumny was not scandal : Marie-Antoinette was always pure.' Without being her knight to that extent, without any

The beauty of the Queen in her youth was much extolled. She was not a great beauty, taking each feature in detail : the eyes, though expressive, were not very handsome ; her aquiline nose appeared too prominent : 'I am not very sure that her nose belongs to her face,' said a witty witness. Her lower lip was bigger and more prominent than one likes in the mouth of a pretty woman ; her figure too was rather full ; but the general aspect was one of great distinction and supreme nobility. Even in undress, she was a queenly beauty rather than a woman of the world : 'No woman, said M. de Meilhan, had a better carriage of the head, which was attached in such a way that each of her movements had grace and nobility. Her walk was light and dignified, and recalled Virgil's phrase : *Incessu patuit dea.* What was rarer in her person was the union of grace and the most imposing dignity.' Add to this a dazzlingly fresh complexion, admirable arms and hands, a charming smile, appropriate speech, prompted less by mind than by soul, by the desire to be kind and to please. However much she loved freedom of conversation and jests, the familiarity of private life ; however much she played at being a shepherdess or a woman of fashion, she had but to rise and resume her commanding air : she became a Queen again in a moment.

For a long time this gracious woman, full of confidence in the prestige of royalty and only thinking of agreeably tempering it for those about her, took no interest in politics or at least only by accident, and when driven to it in a certain sense by her intimate circle. She continued to live her life of fairyland and illusions, even after the odious scandals, satirical songs and infamous pamphlets had begun to circulate in Paris, and ascribed to her a secret and continuous influence which she did not possess. The affair of the necklace was the first signal of her misfortunes, and the bandage which had hitherto covered her eyes was torn away. She began to come out of her enchanted hamlet, and to discover the world such as it is when it has an interest in being malignant. When she

prejudice, without any responsibility, one may, I repeat, and one should, if one is no more than a man of honour and feeling, preserve all respect and a tender interest for the queen and the woman in Marie-Antoinette. Let us not misplace the real essential points of human justice and morality.

was brought so far as to concern herself habitually with public things and to have her opinion on the extraordinary measures and events which were every day forced upon her attention, she brought to them the least politic disposition that could be imagined, I mean indignation at the sight of vile actions, personal prejudice which her most manifest interest did not always succeed in combating, a resentment against insults which was not a desire for vengeance, but the proud and delicate suffering of wounded dignity. If Louis XVI had been different, if he could have been influenced by an active, energetic impelling force, there is no doubt that at one time or another, inspired by the Queen, he might have attempted some bold step that might have been rash, but which might also for a time have re-established the tottering monarchy. But it was not to be: Louis XVI's soul escaped from and shirked his kingly rôle by reason of his very virtues; his nature, entirely made up of piety and humanity, perpetually tended towards self-sacrifice, and, falling from one weakness into another, he was destined not to recover his greatness until the moment when he became a martyr. The Queen had it not in her to overcome such absolute incapacity and royal inertia. She had fits of energy, but no continuity. That is the perpetual complaint that returns to the pen of the Count of La Marck in the secret Correspondence which has just been published: 'The Queen, he wrote to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau (30 December 1790), the Queen has certainly enough intelligence and fortitude to do great things; but it must be confessed, and you may have remarked it better than I, that, whether into affairs, or merely into conversation, she does not always bring that degree of care and attention and that continuity which are indispensable in order to become thoroughly informed about the things one ought to know, and to prevent errors and secure success.' And elsewhere, the same man says, writing again to the same person (28 September 1791): 'I must speak plainly, the King is incapable of reigning, and the Queen, if well seconded, is alone able to make good his incapacity. That alone would not suffice: the Queen would have to see the necessity of concerning herself with affairs methodically and consistently; and she would have to make it a rule not to

grant a half-confidence to a large number of people, but on the other hand to give her full confidence to the man she has chosen to second her.' And again (10 October 1791): 'The Queen, in spite of her intelligence and a proved courage, allows every opportunity to escape her of seizing the reins of government, and surrounding the King with faithful men, devoted to her service and to saving the State with and through her.' In truth, it takes more than a day to recover from such a long and habitual state of levity; in one who had never opened a book of history in her life, and had dreamed of an idle and rustic royalty at Trianon, it would have required at least the genius of a Catherine of Russia to struggle with dangers so unexpected: it is enough that her past frivolity did not debase or corrupt her heart, and that in a time of trial it was as generous, as proud, as royal and as fully endowed as it might have been when leaving the hands of nature.

I will not discuss, as you may well believe, the line of policy to which Marie-Antoinette thought good to return when left to herself. We are not going to be constitutional purists: what she desired was assuredly not the Constitution of '91, it was the security of the throne, that of France as she understood it, the honour of the King and her own, and that of the nobility, the integrity of the heritage to be left to her children; do not expect any more of her. The letters from her which have been already published, others which will be published some day, will permit of our establishing with certainty this portion of history. She desired the security of the State through her brother the Emperor, through the foreign powers, but not through the émigrés. She cannot contain her indignation against the latter: 'The cowards, after forsaking us, she exclaimed, presume to expect that we alone shall expose ourselves and that we alone shall serve all their interests.' In the very fine letter to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, which contains those words, she said again, after explaining a desperate plan (August 1791): 'I have listened, as far as I have been able, to men of both sides, and from their various opinions I have formed my own; I know not whether it will be carried out, you know the person I have to do with (the King): at the very moment when we think we have convinced

him, a word, an argument will make him change, without his being aware of it ; it is for that reason again that there are a thousand things that cannot be undertaken. Well, whatever happens, remain steadfast in your friendship and attachment to me, I have indeed need of it, and believe me that, however great the misfortune that pursues me, I may yield to circumstances, but never will I consent to any step that is unworthy of me ; in misfortune we become more conscious of what we are. My blood flows in my son's veins, and I hope that some day he will show himself a worthy grandson of Maria-Theresa.'

Her last gleam of joy and hope was on the occasion of the journey to Varennes. At the moment when this so often deferred plan was at last about to be carried into effect, about midnight, the Queen, crossing the Carrousel on foot to the place where the coach which M. de Fersen had prepared for the royal family was waiting, passed M. de La Fayette's carriage : she observed it, 'and she had a sudden fancy to try to touch the wheels of his carriage with a switch that she held in her hand.' It was an innocent vengeance. That stroke of the switch was her last youthful freak. Three days afterwards, how different was the state of affairs ! When Mme Campan saw her again on her return from Varennes, the Queen took off her cap, and showed her the effect which grief had had upon her hair : 'in a single night it had turned as white as a woman's of seventy.' She was thirty-six.

The last two years of the Queen's life would suffice to redeem a thousand times as many errors as this gracious and refined lady might have committed in her heedless years, and to consecrate such a destiny to the pity of the ages. Imprisoned in her own home, a prey to continual anguish, we see her becoming chastened at the side of that saintly sister, Madame Elisabeth, becoming more and more steadied and strengthened in those family feelings and that religion of home, which offer so much comfort only to a soul that is naturally good and uncorrupted. On the fatal days, on the days of insurrection and sedition, when her whole dwelling is invaded, she is at her post ; she suffers insult with pride, with nobleness, with forgiveness, at the same time that she shields her children with her own body. In the midst of her own dangers she is wholly occupied, in her goodness,

with those of others, and she is careful not to compromise anybody uselessly in her cause. On the last day, the supreme day of Royalty, the 10 August, she tries to impart to Louis XVI an impetus which might have made him die like a King, like a son of Louis XIV ; but he was fated to die like a Christian and a son of Saint Louis. She herself enters upon that path of a heroism that is all resignation and patience. Once confined in the Temple, she does tapestry-work, she concerns herself with the education of her daughter and son, composes a prayer for her children, and prepares herself to drink the cup in silence. The head of the Princesse de Lamballe, held up at her prison bars, gives her the first cold shudder of death. When leaving the Temple on her way to the Conciergerie, she struck her head against the wicket-gate, through having neglected to stoop ; somebody asked her if she had hurt herself : ' Oh, no, she said ; nothing hurts me now.' But every hour of her agony has been noted, and we need not repeat it. I do not think that there can exist a monument of stupidity more atrocious and more ignominious for our kind, than the Trial of Marie-Antoinette as we find it officially recorded in the twenty-ninth volume of the *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française*. The majority of the replies she gave to her accusers are curtailed or suppressed ; but, as in every iniquitous trial, the mere text of the imputations testifies against the assassins. When we think that a century called a century of lights, and of the most refined civilisation, ends in public acts of such barbarity, we begin to doubt human nature and to have a terror of the savage beast (*la bête féroce*), as stupid (*bête*) indeed as it is savage, that this human nature ever contains within itself and that only awaits an opportunity to come out. Immediately after her condemnation, having been taken back from the tribunal to the Conciergerie, Marie-Antoinette wrote a letter to Madame Elisabeth, which was dated the 16 October, at half-past four in the morning. In this letter which has just been reproduced in fac-simile,¹ and which is very simple in tone, we read : ' It is to you, my sister, that I write for the last time. I have just been condemned, not to a shameful death, it is shameful only to criminals,

¹ *La dernière Lettre de la Reine Marie-Antoinette*, Paris, 1851.

but to rejoin your brother. Innocent like him, I hope to show the same firmness that he did in these last moments. I am calm, as one is when one's conscience has nothing to reproach one with; I deeply regret having to leave my poor children. You know that I lived only for them; and you, my kind and tender sister, you who through your friendship sacrificed everything to be with us, in what position do I leave you!... The truest sentiments of a mother, a friend, a submissive Christian, breathe through this testamentary letter. It is well known that, a few hours later, Marie-Antoinette gave proofs of that tranquillity and that firmness which she hoped to have at the supreme moment, and even the official report of the executioners acknowledge that she mounted the scaffold with *courage enough (assez de courage)*.

I do not believe that we yet have all the elements for writing the life of Marie-Antoinette with becoming simplicity; there are in existence collections of letters still in manuscript from her to her brothers the Emperor Joseph and the Emperor Leopold, and the Chancery of Vienna must contain treasures of this kind. But I dare to conjecture that the publication of these confidential documents, if it takes place some day, will only confirm the idea which reflexion and a careful reading of the Memoirs are able to give at present. Marie-Antoinette's noble mother, from whom she inherited her aquiline nose and her queenly bearing, imprinted on her the stamp of her race; but this imperial character, which reappeared at great moments, was not the habitual character of her mind, her education and her dream; she was only fitfully a daughter of the Cæsars. She was born to be a peaceable and somewhat shepherdess-like heiress of the Empire, rather than to reconquer her own kingdom; she was made above all, under that august brow, to be a lovable wife, a constant and faithful friend, a tender and devoted mother. She had all the virtues and the graces, and also some of the weaknesses of woman. Adversity gave her back her virtues; elevation of heart and dignity of character stood out all the more brilliantly because they were not borne by a mind quite equal to the circumstances. Such as she was, a victim of the most brutal and most odious of immolations, an example of the

most terrible of vicissitudes, she does not need that the cultus of the old races should subsist to arouse a feeling of pity and delicate sympathy in all who read the story of her brilliant years and her last torments. Every man who has in his heart some of the generosity of a Barnave, will be impressed and, if we must say so, will be converted in like manner with him, on approaching this noble personality who suffered such outrages. As to the women, Mme de Staél long ago spoke to them the words most calculated to touch their hearts, when she said in her Defence of Marie-Antoinette : 'I return to you, women, all immolated in the person of so tender a mother, all immolated by the outrage committed on weakness. . . . ; your sway is over if ferocity reigns.' Marie-Antoinette is indeed more a mother than a queen. Remember the first words that escaped from her when, at the time she was still Dauphiness, somebody in her presence was blaming a woman for having addressed herself to Mme Du Barry to obtain pardon for her son, who had been compromised in a duel : 'In her place I should have done the same, and if necessary, I should have cast myself even at Zamore's feet' (that was Mme Du Barry's little negro). And remember also Marie-Antoinette's last words before the atrocious tribunal, when, examined about some frightful imputations which touched the innocence of her son, she contented herself with the reply : 'I appeal to all mothers ! ' That is the supreme cry which dominates her life, the cry which goes to the entrails and will re-echo for her in the future.

One day, at the Temple, a plan of evasion having been concerted, she consented to it. On the next day she wrote that she could not bring herself to it, since by escaping she would be separated from her son : 'Whatever happiness I might find outside, she wrote, I cannot consent to part from him. . . . I could not enjoy anything if I left my children, and this idea leaves me not even a regret.' This, it may be said, is a very simple sentiment, and it is just for that reason that it is beautiful.

BUFFON¹

Monday, 21 July 1851.

THOSE who are not savants, and who wish to plunge into the vast reading of Buffon's Works and to find their way among them, could not take a safer guide, a clearer and more accurate interpreter than M. Flourens, who has rendered a new service to all classes of readers by this excellent work. Nor should Cuvier's article on Buffon, in the *Biographie universelle*, be neglected; every word in it has its measure and its weight. From a different point of view, and for one who has any desire to appreciate the importance of the questions raised and still discussed around the great name of Buffon, we ought to put into the scales the highly important Study which Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire devoted to him (*Fragments biographiques*), as well as what his son and worthy heir, M. Isidore Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, has said in his *Considérations historiques sur la Zoologie*. With regard to the style, the writer and the man, M. Villemain appears to have exhausted the subject in one of his finest Lectures on the *Literature of the Eighteenth Century*. I will take quick and abundant advantage of all these aids in the little I shall be able to say here of Buffon.

Buffon, the last to vanish of the four great men of the eighteenth century, closed this century so to say on the day of his death, the 16 April 1788. Born at Montbar, in Burgundy, in September 1707, he was five years older than Jean-Jacques Rousseau; he was thirteen years junior to Voltaire and eighteen years to Montesquieu. His father, M. Le Clerc, was a Councillor in the Parliament of Dijon, which at that time contained many men of study and learning, many a person of good stock in whom the

¹ *History of Buffon's Works and Ideas*, by M. Flourens, 1850.
(Hachette.)

old sap had not dried up. Buffon, moreover, used to say that he took especially after his mother, of whom he would speak tenderly and complacently. He obtained his education at the College at Dijon, and showed from the beginning a great disposition for work and pleasure. Nature had given him every advantage, stature, carriage, face, strength, and an ardour in every pursuit which was in the end governed by reason and will. ‘The body of an athlete and the soul of a sage’; thus did Voltaire afterwards define him in his just and fair moments. Buffon only by degrees however became that sage and philosopher. His youth appears to have been rather violent and impetuous; but, in whatever way he may have employed his evening, next morning he had himself called at a fixed hour to set to work again. He was greatly interested, even at school, in geometry, and, to judge from the ardour with which he studied it, it seemed to be almost his vocation; or rather, in his wide and exalted curiosity, he cultivated equally all branches of learning in his early years: *He was unwilling that any other man should be able to understand what he could not understand himself*; he would have felt humiliated as a man, and this noble feeling of pride, sustained by a stubborn will and aided by a wonderful intelligence, bore him to the summit of the sublime sciences. Nature set the crown on all these gifts by clothing them in eloquence.

As a young man he struck up an intimacy with the governor of a young English lord who was sojourning at Dijon, and this intimacy was the occasion of his making a trip to Italy and another to England; those were his only travels. The man who had embraced so much space and so many epochs, and described so many living forms, was able to say: ‘*I have spent fifty years at my desk.*’ Buffon was near-sighted: that was his only infirmity. He developed more fully in consequence his faculty for seeing everything through his mind’s eye, for picturing everything by careful contemplation.

This first connexion with England was by the way very useful to Buffon: it enabled him to make an early acquaintance with the great things that had been accomplished there in the order of the sciences. He entered without any hesitation upon Newton’s path and that of the great physicists of his school. His first published

writings are translated Hale. *Method of Fluxions*. preface to the latter expounds in a clear, the quarrels which had calculation of the infinite. the head of his translation mental method in physics a. so strongly that we ask ourselves afterwards constructed such fine o. M. de Montbelliard

times, quarto, of his *Histoire naturelle*. monuments of the century. From that time successively to the number of a man who had a life of his death (1749-1783). A year, which prevented his working cause any perceptible delay the execution of this lengthy several collaborators. After a certain moment, M. Gueneau then the Abbé Bexon,

'The system of nature depends perhaps, he says, assfully the style these principles are unknown to us, their combinatorial parts of How can we presume to flatter ourselves that we are able to throughout ; mysteries without any other guide than the imagination, and we forget that the effect is the only means of knowing the causon of is by delicate experiments, reasoned out and pursued, that we hope nature to disclose her secret ; the other methods have all been unsuccessful, and the true physicist cannot help regarding the ancient systems as ancient dreamings, and is obliged to read most of the new ones as he would read a novel. The collections of experiments and observations are therefore the only books that are able to increase our knowledge.'

This first Buffon, at once a geometer and a man of experiments, did not yet presage the second, the bold generaliser who was rather prompt to subordinate facts to ideas. We know the reply he once gave to Guyton de Morveau the chemist, who wanted to pass a body through the crucible, to ascertain a fact which Buffon deduced from theory : 'The best crucible is the mind,' answered Buffon. A very venturesome word when it is indeed a question of pronouncing on the works of nature !

But the truth is that there was in Buffon a genius which was to break away and to demand satisfaction in its turn : the genius of the painter, of the poet, the man who before everything needed great views to give himself full scope to express them. At the beginning of the twelfth volume of his *Histoire naturelle*, he confesses with a certain ingenuousness that imperious need of his nature, which urges him to insert in his History some general Dissertations in which to spread himself, to treat nature on a large scale and compensate himself for the tedium of the details : 'We will then return to our details with more courage, he says, for I confess that it needs courage

to occupy oneself continually with subjects whose investigation demands the coolest price and allows no scope to genius.'

When he said that genius was more than a greater aptitude for application and a great patience, we see that Buffon did not mean that a patience which has nothing in common with the ~~sa~~^{re} fire. Buffon's genius partakes of the poet as much of the philosopher; he blends and unites the two characters within himself, as was seen in the primitive odes: 'M. de Buffon thinks more of Milton than Newton, said Mme Necker; Milton, according to her, had a much broader mind, and it is more difficult to unite ideas which interest all men than to discover one that explains the phenomena of nature.' Rightly interpreting and discounting this reminiscence noted by Mme Necker, and refusing to believe that there could be a mortal in the world who could hold a higher place in Buffon's estimation than Newton, whose engraved portrait formed the only ornament of his study, I will only conclude that there were in Buffon's genius combinations and images resembling those of Milton, which were clamouring to come out. It has been said that he resembled Newton and Descartes, and that he oscillated a little between the methods of those two philosophers: I will presume to think that he partakes rather of Newton and Milton, and that the systematic part in him had above everything the most exalted poetic character.

Appointed in 1739 Superintendent of the King's Garden, and an Associate of the Academy of Sciences in the same year, Buffon was as yet known only through one of the translations I have spoken of and by a few Memoranda on rather special subjects. It was then that he conceived the plan of turning his position at the King's Garden to good account and becoming the historian of nature. He was thirty-two years of age.

This title of *Natural History* was a little vague at the time; it was so for Buffon himself, who, embracing his subject in all its generality, was willing to try to define it with precision, but on condition of never restricting it. After ten years of preliminary labours, in which he had availed himself of the assistance of Daubenton for the descriptive and anatomical parts, he published in 1749

the three first volumes, quarto, of his *Histoire naturelle*. It was one of the events of the century. From that time the volumes of this monumental History continued to be published regularly and successively to the number of thirty-six, until the time of his death (1749-1788). A serious illness of the author, which prevented his working for nearly two years, did not cause any perceptible delay in the publication. During the execution of this lengthy undertaking, Buffon took several collaborators. After Daubenton, who retired at a certain moment, M. Guenecau de Montbelliard particularly, then the Abbé Bexon, assisted him with the birds, and M. de Montbelliard sometimes even simulated rather successfully the style of the master. But all the great and principal parts of the work are Buffon's; he keeps the control throughout; every volume bears his stamp and impress by reason of some immortal page; the last volumes are not to be distinguished from the preceding ones and are only remarkable for a more accurate arrangement and a greater perfection of ensemble. The volume which contains the *Époques de la Nature*, published in 1778, is considered to be Buffon's masterpiece.

During these fifty years of labour, Buffon's life is uniform. He spends a few months of every year at Paris to carry out the duties and obligations of his position, to further the interests of the institution over which he presides and whose importance he increases daily. Then he returns to Montbar to devote himself for the greater part of the year to study and composition. He has been often described and pictured in this rural and feudal habitation, confined in his tower from early morning, meditating and writing. I regret that our French pens have mixed up a little pleasantry with the idea of respect and veneration that such a life should inspire. In the midst of that tumultuous life, that dissipated and broken-up life of the eighteenth century, Buffon isolates himself; he finds in the strength of his character, in his exalted love of fame and in the powerful interest of the vast study to which he has devoted himself, the means of resisting all irritations, all the petty temptations that surround him. Observe how they all, more or less, yield and succumb to them, all except himself: I say all, and I speak of the greatest. Voltaire, we know too well, lives

on battles and quarrels ; during twenty years they are the death of poor Jean-Jacques, and he loses his head in trying to reply to slanders and calumnies. Even Montesquieu does not remain calm when he is taken to task. His *Esprit des Lois* appeared at the same time as the first volumes of Buffon. The Jansenist *Gazetier* vigorously attacked the two works, and Montesquieu more violently even than Buffon : Montesquieu immediately took up his pen : 'He has replied in a rather thick pamphlet, and in the best tone, wrote Buffon to a friend (21 March 1750) ; his reply was a complete success. Notwithstanding his example, I think of acting differently, and shall not reply by a single word. Every one has his delicate shade of self-esteem. Mine goes so far as to think that certain people cannot even offend me.'¹ Such was Buffon's constant principle of conduct, *to allow calumny to recoil upon itself*. And returning twenty-eight years later to the same subject of attack, when, in his *Époques de la Nature*, he resumes that same ensemble of views and labours : 'Let us try nevertheless, he said, to make the truth more palpable ; let us increase the number of probabilities ; let us make probability greater ; let us add lights to lights, by uniting facts, by accumulating proofs, and let us afterwards submit to the judgment of the world without any uneasiness and without appeal ; for I have always thought that a man who writes should concern himself solely with his subject and on no account with himself ; that it is contrary to propriety to try to interest others in you, and that consequently personal criticisms should remain unanswered.'

This lofty personal dignity rules the whole of Buffon's life. He never allowed himself for a single day to be diverted or distracted from that contemplation and description of nature, for which the longest human life was still so short.

¹ Letter to the Abbé Le Blanc, in the *Mélanges de la Société des Bibliophiles*, 1822.—The articles in question may be read in the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, a Jansenist periodical, of the 6 and 23 February 1750 ; it was a formal denunciation, which led the Sorbonne to censure the book (see also the issue of the 26 June 1754 of the same paper). With all his narrowness and bitterness, the theological *Gazetier* is not wrong on one point—that is the non-Christian tendency of Buffon's book. As I have said elsewhere, Pascal's greatest adversary in the eighteenth century, his principal but apparently unconscious refuter, was Buffon *Port-Royal*, vol. iii, page 414).

Let us see him as he was at Montbar; but let us not enter, as Hérault-Séchelles did, a frivolous, unbelieving and mocking spy; let us enter rather with the deep and exalted feeling which made Jean-Jacques, when passing through Montbar in 1770, desire to see that workroom which has been called the cradle of Natural History, and kiss the threshold on his knees. The pavilion in which Buffon worked was at the extremity of his gardens, and it was reached by ascending one terrace after another. Thither he betook himself every morning at six o'clock. In the height of summer he would work in a very lofty cabinet, with a vault like that of the old chapels and churches: 'M. de Buffon, said Mme Necker, thinks better and more easily in the great elevation of his tower, at Montbar, where the air is purer; he has often said so.' There, in a bare room, before a wooden secretaire, he meditated, he wrote. No papers in front of him, no accumulation of books; all that erudite lumber only impeded Buffon. A subject deeply thought out, contemplation, silence and solitude, those were his matter and his instruments. In another cabinet, a little less lofty and cool than the first, where he also worked, there was no other ornament on the walls but the engraving of Newton,—the great interpreter of nature. It has been attempted to cast ridicule upon Buffon's dressing before sitting down to write. It was his habit, as soon as he rose, to be dressed, and to have his hair done according to the fashion of the time; he believed that a man's clothing formed a part of his person. In other respects everything in his workroom was expressive of simplicity. Hume reproduced the impression made upon him by Buffon when he said that in his walk and his bearing he answered to the idea of a Marshal of France rather than of a man of Letters. His physiognomy reflected the loftiest ideas. 'Black eyebrows, shading a pair of very active black eyes,' stood out still more under his beautiful white hair. Elevation, tranquillity, dignity, a consciousness of his power, distinguished his whole person.

A magnificent good sense reigned within him and regulated everythin' around him. 'Buffon lives absolutely like a philosopher, a judicious observer said of him; ¹ he is just without being generous, and his whole conduct

¹ Mallet du Pan (*Mémoires et Correspondance*, 1851, vol. i, page 124 ff.).

is traced according to reason. He loves order, and he brings it into everything.' With that perfect justice and that goodness which was the result of rule and temperament, he never ceased to do good among his neighbours, and the people of Montbar worshipped him.

An altitude and aloofness so constant and imperturbable was made to provoke and irritate the scoffers; Buffon encountered them even in the camp of the philosophers. Voltaire tried at times to bite and ridicule him; but he stopped short from an involuntary feeling of respect. D'Alembert, less delicate than Voltaire, and less prompted by the feeling of the beautiful, gave the reins to his sarcasm at Buffon's expense. He loved neither his person nor his talents; he never called him anything but *the great phrase-monger, the king of phrase-mongers*; he mimicked and caricatured him (d'Alembert had an unfortunate talent for aping people). Buffon was informed of it; he pitied the great geometrician for acting the ape, and paid no attention to him.

The publication of the first three volumes of the *Histoire naturelle* (1749) caused a great stir and a sensation. There were cries of admiration and loud protests. The protests came not only from the theologians, but also from the savants. We have the critical *Observations* which these volumes called from M. de Malesherbes. On entering upon this vast subject, even after ten years of studies, Buffon was still too unprepared for it. The botanists in particular were able to catch him at fault, *in flagrante delicto* of inaccuracy and thoughtlessness in his manner of judging Linné, whose methods he appreciated. Buffon knew little of botany: 'I am short-sighted, he said; I have learned botany three times, and I have forgotten it as often: if I had had good eyes, all the steps I have taken might have recalled to me my knowledge in that sphere.' It would seem that, cut out by nature on a large scale it was difficult for him to stoop to the contemplation of little things: the cedar of Lebanon he willingly contemplated, but the hyssop appeared too small to him. Thus it was that he ignored the insects, that he spoke ill of the bees, although Réaumur was already come. It needed all the charms and the prettiness of the Humming-bird to reconcile him to the little creature. When he speaks of animals, it is always

those that are more or less analogous to man, the vertebrates of a higher order. In his *Histoire naturelle*, he can conceive no other method at first but that which consists in considering the animals according to their relations, either of proximity or of utility, to man. He pictures to himself a quite newly-created man without any notions, in a region where the animals, birds, fishes, plants, and stones successively appear before him. After a first sorting, this man will distinguish animate from inanimate matter, and, from animate matter, properly speaking, he will distinguish vegetable matter. Having arrived at this first great division, *animal, vegetable and mineral*, he will come to distinguish in the animal kingdom those which live on the *earth* from those that dwell in the *water* or those which rise into the *air*: 'Then let us imagine ourselves in the place of that man, continues Buffon, or let us suppose that he has acquired as much knowledge and that he has as much experience as we have, he will come to judge the objects of Natural History by their relations towards himself; those which are most *necessary*, most *useful* to him will hold the first place; for example, he will give the preference in the order of animals to the horse, the dog, the ox, etc. . . . Then he will concern himself with those which, though not domestic, inhabit the same regions, the same climates, such as the stag, the hare, etc.' In this order which he calls the most natural of all, and which is only provisional, Buffon will first classify the animals and other creatures of nature only according to their degree of utility to man, and not according to any essential characters which exist in them, and which might connect with them others and apparently very distant ones. To finish with this method of classification, which cannot be that of our days, I will remark that only after the publication of a large number of volumes did Buffon, gradually taught by practice and by the auxiliary descriptions of Daubenton, come to form classifications that were more in accordance with reality and more strictly founded upon comparative observation of the creatures in themselves. Those who have studied the subject will remark a progress of this kind in his work on *Gazelles* published in 1764 (vol. xii), and especially in his nomenclature of the Monkeys (1766 and 1767, vols. xiv and xv).

But if in detail and scientific method Buffon long failed to satisfy the requirements of a small number of advanced observers, he impressed the public mind at once by his broad views, the widest that could be offered to the meditation of the philosophical physicist. In a Dissertation on the theory of the earth, he tried to determine in the first place the structure and the mode of formation of this terrestrial globe, the scene of the life of the animals and the vegetation of the plants ; he tried, from the great geological facts so far as they were known at the time, to determine their successive revolutions from the beginning of the earth until its present state of consistency and composition. From this he passed on to conjectural considerations on the birth and reproduction of animate beings. When he came to man, these slightly mysterious explanations were relieved by some observations as sensible as they were acute, on the divers ages of infancy, puberty, virility and old age, on the acquisitions and the sphere of action of the different senses. The third volume is crowned by the admirable and well-known passage, where the first man is pictured as he might have been on the first day of the Creation, awaking quite new to himself and to everything around him, and telling the story of his first thoughts. Here Buffon became the rival even of Milton, supposing Milton to have been a physicist, without his religion and adoration. Later, Condillac, wishing to set Buffon right and to convict him of inaccuracy, pictured, in his *Traité des Sensations*, that singular statue which he gradually animated by giving to it one sense after another in succession. Buffon was much amused at this colourless and chilly statue, and when Condillac came to solicit his vote for the French Academy, it is related that he received him with much humour, promised him what he desired and embraced him with the words ' You have made a statue speak, and I a man : I embrace you because you still have some heat, but, my dear Abbé, your statue has none.'

The fourth volume of the *Histoire naturelle* appeared in 1753. Faithful to the method he had announced, Buffon there gave us the history of the principal domestic animals, the horse, the ass, the ox, and prefaced it by an admirable *Discourse on the nature of animals compared*

with that of man. There he shows how good generally triumphs over evil, and pleasure over pain, in the physical nature of every sentient being. What disturbs the balance in the case of man is his imagination, which corrupts the good and, by anticipating evil, often brings it about. Buffon would not wish to reduce man to the dull and stupid happiness of the animals, but would like to elevate him through reason to a state of higher felicity. He would like to persuade us that 'happiness is within ourselves ; that the peaceful enjoyment of our soul is our only and true good.' He would like to divert man from the insensate passions which violate nature and are followed by weariness and disgust. From the way in which he speaks of 'that horrible disgust with ourselves, which leaves us with no other desire but that of ceasing to be,' we see that if this calm and superior soul was never infected by the malady of the Rousseaus, the Werthers and the future Renés, he did not fail to recognise it and denounce it at its source : 'In this state of illusion and darkness, he says, we would fain change the very nature of our soul ; it was given to us for knowledge only, and we would employ it only for feeling.' The true sage, according to him, is the man who can master these false pretensions and these false desires : 'Satisfied with his condition, he desires to be no more than what he has always been, to live as he has always lived ; self-sufficient, he has little need of others, and cannot be a burden to them ; continually occupied in exercising the faculties of his soul, he perfects his understanding, he cultivates his mind, he acquires fresh knowledge, satisfies his needs at every moment without remorse, without disgust, and possesses the whole universe by possessing himself. Such a man is without doubt the happiest creature in Nature.' Give an additional motive, an additional impetus to this sage, give him 'glory, that powerful incentive of all great souls,' make him set it before himself as a brilliant goal that attracts without agitating, and you will have Buffon himself, Buffon, who, to paint the noblest ideal of man, had but to seek the features within himself. To all the evil that he says of the passions, we may however offer a single reply : 'But you yourself, we might say to him, would you have escaped that weariness, that languor of the soul which follows the age of passions, if you had

not been sustained and possessed by that fixed passion for glory ?'

As a painter of metaphysics, in this Dissertation and those which relate to the senses, Buffon is of the first order. What is disputable and hazarded in them is redeemed by views which show deep and definitive reason.¹ As a painter of animals, he produced nothing more noble, more majestic and more perfect than his descriptions of the *Horse*, the *Stag*, the *Swan*: they are pictures of living nature, in the greatest and most royal manner. In his description of the *Stag*, we may remark with what art he designedly used the whole vocabulary of the old venery: if that vocabulary were lost, we could recover it in his work, employed in the broadest and most ingenious manner. He has been blamed, in this article on the *Stag*, for his unrestricted praise of the chase, that destructive pastime. But, independently of the pleasure that he really took in describing it with the dignity that he saw in that pursuit, is it not evident that with this passage Buffon aimed at gaining the approval of the Court? It protected him on the side of his enemies, and secured him support and favour for the enlargement of the King's Garden.

I know not what suggested the idea that Buffon's style is pompous: it is no more than noble, dignified, with a magnificent appositeness and a perfect clearness. It is elevated, not so much by animation and effusion, as by its very continuity in an ever serious and sustained order. Fontenelle, before Buffon, had done much to introduce, to insinuate science among society; but what a difference between his oblique and flimsy proceeding and Buffon's broad, open and truly sovereign manner! What Buffon especially aimed at in writing was sequence, connectedness of speech, a continuous connection. He could not tolerate a chopped-up, jerky style, and that was a fault that he blamed in Montesquieu. He attributed genius to the continuity of thought in one and the same subject, and his aim was to see speech issue forth like a river which spreads and bathes all things with an

¹ In reading Buffon on metaphysics, we must make allowance for the precautions he had to take: 'Buffon has just left me, said the President de Broses in a letter; he gave me the key to his fourth volume, on the way in which the things said for the Sorbonne should be understood.'

abundant and limpid flow. 'He did not put a single word into his works that he could not answer for.' From a criticism that he uttered in conversation on a work of Thomes, we see what he understood by those little words, by those natural links and those graduated shades of speech, and what delicacy of taste he brought to them. In this way he was as careful and scrupulous as the most fastidious of the Ancients ; he had ear, measure and number. His great aim was clearness as well as connectedness. When he made his secretary read his manuscript aloud, he put a cross at the slightest halt, at the slightest hesitation, and afterwards corrected the passage until he had made it luminous and flowing. After that, I cannot find in him any innovation or created expression as coloured as we could imagine to-day ; in that respect Chateaubriand, and even Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, have put him in the shade. A few charming examples from him are quoted, in a fresh and truly felicitous language, but they are rare. Buffon's great beauty consists rather in continuance and abundance of flow. His expression, at least, has never any of that restlessness or anxiety which in others accompanies an extreme desire for innovation. In certain corners of his pictures it exhibits those airy graces which impress me much more than the most frequently quoted passages. For example, speaking of the Stag : 'The Stag, he says, appears to have a good eye, an exquisite sense of smell and an excellent ear. When he wants to listen, he raises his head, pricks his ears, and then he hears very distant sounds : *when he steps into a little copse or some other half-concealed place, he stops to look in every direction, and then seeks the lee-side to scent any cause of uneasiness.*' What a light picture, drawn in three lines, and tranquilly complete ! So again, speaking of the Babillard (Lesser Whitethroat), that bird of timid character and so prompt to take fright, he says : ' But the instant the danger is past, all is forgotten, and the next moment our Warbler resumes his gaiety, his movements and his song. *His song is heard coming from the thickest branches ; there he usually keeps concealed, appears for an instant on the edge of the brushwood, and quickly returns to the shade, especially during the heat of the day. In the morning we see him gathering the dew, and,*

after those short showers which fall on summer days, he flies to the moistened leaves and bathes in the drops he has shaken from the foliage.' In these delicate and transparent passages Buffon associates himself as a painter with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who brings besides into these scenes of nature a ray of moonlight and a half-tint of melancholy.

In general, Buffon paints nature from every point of view that may elevate the soul, widen it, and bring to it serenity and calm ; he loves with a single word to refer everything back to man ; he often has voluptuousness in his brush, but he has not that sensibility in which Rousseau and others excel : Buffon is a genius who lacks tenderness.

Buffon's most perfect work, as I have said, is his dissertation or tableau of the *Epochs of Nature* which he published in 1778, at the age of seventy-one, and which he had recopied, we are assured, as many as eighteen times (the reader may discount this number, if he pleases) before bringing it to that degree of perfection which satisfied him. In this work he returned to the old ideas of his first volume on the Theory of the Earth, and presented them in a more complete light and with new combinations, I dare not say with new likelihood. For in this way Buffon corrected himself : in the amplitude of his form, he was averse to all rehandlings ; as a great artist, he found it more simple, after a work was once produced, to correct himself in a new work, in a new picture, beginning anew as Nature does. Here, in the *Epoches*, he relates and describes in seven pictures the revolutions of the terrestrial globe, from the moment when he supposes it to have been fluid until the reign of man. Buffon does not offer his hypothesis as a reality, but as a simple means of conceiving what must have taken place in a more or less analogous manner, and of fixing our ideas on the greatest objects of Natural Philosophy. This precaution once taken, he describes with a continuity, a precision and a feeling of reality which causes astonishment and illusion at the same time, those immense and terrible scenes of separation, those terrifying spectacles which had no human spectator. They say that Buffon was very fond of Richardson the novelist 'because of his great truthfulness, and because he had closely re-

garded all the objects that he painted.' We might apply the same praise to the *Epochs of Nature*; he knows and sees those things which took place before the appearance of man from having regarded them at close quarters. Richardson, in truth, does not know the private life of the Harlowe family better than Buffon appears to know those for ever unknown and vanished Epochs which he renders present, that private life of the Universe which he enables us to witness. Never, in these vast circumstantial details, does the smile of doubt pass over his lips. He treated that sublime romance with the finished precision that he might have employed in a description of real and existing nature. 'Where wast thou, said God to Job, when I laid the foundations of the earth?' M. de Buffon seems to say without any emotion: *I was there!* He elevates our thoughts, he widens them, he disturbs and confounds them too by this boldness which consists in resolutely putting himself into the story, himself, a simple mortal, in the place of God, of the Infinite Power. It would seem as if such an act of temerity or of sublimity, whichever you please to call it, such an act of usurpation could only be expiated by his falling on his knees immediately after and humbling himself in the most submissive prayer.

Milton and Bossuet would have done so, and their tableau would have appeared all the greater. Buffon does not do so, and does not dream of doing so. The moral feeling is a little hurt, in spite of the astonishment that so fine a work arouses, to find him so mute and so desolate in respect of Heaven.—Only the Genius of humanity dominates it and becomes glorified on a last page of a grand and superb, though a little saddened, perspective.¹

Nowhere does Buffon show better than in this work of his septuagenarian period, all his power in respect of clearness and fullness of expression, of vast and flexible flow of speech applied to the greatest objects and the

¹ A chapter might be written on Buffon's religion. Habitually he takes the purely natural point of view, that of Lucretius, but prudence prompts him to conceal it in places, and he speaks of the Creator as a matter of form. That is only too evident, and in the *Epochs of Nature*, for example, there would prevail a *relatively* more religious and more sacred feeling, if the author had been able to set aside his precautions, and had given full scope to that immense and fruitful power of generation, as he conceived it, incessantly circulating in nature. Mme Necker

most serious. Thus he matured incessantly and developed as he grew older, improving slowly day by day, adding to his ideas and drawing a certain freshness and renovation even from the depths of his researches.

Montesquieu in his old age was tired out, and he appeared so: Buffon was not. A comparison of Buffon with Montesquieu would be pregnant, and would help to define precisely the characteristic features of his natural form and of the working method of his talent. Buffon admitted that Montesquieu had genius, but he denied him style: he found, especially in the *Esprit des Lois*, too many sections, too many divisions, and this defect, which he blamed in the general idea of the book, he also saw in the details of the thoughts and sentences; he found fault with the too pointed style and the want of connectedness: 'I knew him well,' said Buffon of Montesquieu, 'and this defect had a physical cause. The President was almost blind, and he was so vivacious that most of the time he forgot what he wanted to dictate, so that he was obliged to restrict himself within the smallest possible space.' Thus he explained how it happened that Montesquieu's language sometimes appeared docked. He, Buffon, on the contrary had the power of remembering his vast writings, and he afterwards spread them out before himself at will in the whole extent of their thought and expression.

On the other hand, Montesquieu's conversation was all flashes, sallies, images, and resembled his writings. It was cut up like his style, quick, unexpected, sown with brusqueries and apropos: he never missed the ball when it was thrown to him. Buffon's conversation, on the contrary, was much derided as not being equal to his style in writing: I can well believe it: after a labour of so many hours a day, and so constant an application of a mind which had borne and supported so many things,

'speaks of Buffon as a *Pyrrhonist*, and we might indeed find many contradictions, both for and against, in the different parts of his *Natural History*. Certain of his chapters on Man seem to be the work of an *idealist* who hardly believes in matter: his dissertations on Nature and his *Epochs* are by a naturalist who could easily dispense with God. In his daily life Buffon affected to respect everything that is worthy of respect, and when he was at Montbar, he even regularly observed the practices of religion: he was a man who could take part in them with a sort of sincere emotion, through his imagination and sensibility.'

he had need of relaxation, and in the family circle and among friends speech was left to itself. However Mme Necker, who is so excellent an authority to consult on everything that concerns Buffon, has told us of the piquancy and the instructiveness of his conversation, and has quoted more than one example of it. It would be very singular indeed if it had been otherwise. A mind with such wealth of knowledge and ideas could not be commonplace except through neglect.¹ Only, it was necessary to wait for him, to catch him at the proper season and know how to listen to him. When talking, Buffon loved neither contradictions nor interruptions ; at the first opposition he would stop and hold his tongue : ' I cannot consent,' he said, ' to continue the conversation with a man who believes himself entitled, after thinking of a thing for the first time, to contradict one who has thought over it all his life.' That led him to have his familiars and admirers at home, who never contradicted him ; he readily tolerated them. He suffered them to speak to him point-blank of his genius, and he would speak of it himself with bonhomie, just as his century was already speaking of it and as posterity was about to speak of it.

¹ 'I was happy,' says Gibbon in his *Memoirs*, to make the acquaintance of M. de Buffon, who to a sublime genius united the most amiable simplicity of mind and manners.'—'That great and amiable man,' he says of him again on the last page of these same *Memoirs*.

MADAME DE MAINTENON

Monday, 28 July 1851.

THE moment is favourable to Mme de Maintenon. Public interest has returned with ardour to everything connected with the age of Louis XIV, and, from the moment that it was directed especially to the intellectual side of it, that lady was sure to count largely and to take a foremost rank. Mme de Maintenon's intellectual qualities make us forgive her the wrongs that history is entitled to lay at her door. These wrongs have become greatly exaggerated in course of time by public clamour. As a rule Mme de Maintenon had no initiative in the great public acts of the time. Except in one or two cases, which might be open to discussion, she only seconded with all her power and all her zeal the errors and faults of that ending reign. *Her* chief business was to occupy, to enliven, to amuse or to entertain from within, that narrowed circle of the last years of Louis XIV. It is this attitude and this unique rôle that she affects in her language, in her conversations, in her correspondence, and, if you read her with any connectedness, she almost convinces you in the end. She is one of those who may be abused from a distance, but whom one cannot attack with impunity at close quarters. She impresses by a tone of noble simplicity and discreet dignity: she pleases by the perfect and piquant expression she is able to give to what is right and just. There are times even when we might say that she charms; but, as soon as we quit her, this charm is no longer able to hold us, and our prejudice against her personality regains the upper-hand. I know not whether I correctly render others' impression, but that is exactly my own whenever I have approached Mme de Maintenon more or less, nearly. I should like to analyse the reasons and explain them.

In recent years Mme de Maintenon has found a historian such as she might have desired, one of the family, a man gifted with seriousness and delicacy, the present Duc de Noailles. The latter half of his *Histoire* is greatly looked forward to : I will take ample advantage of the two volumes already published, venturing however upon a little more liberty or licence of judgment.

Born in 1635 in the conciergerie of the prison of Niort, where her father was confined at the time, Françoise d'Aubigné began life like a romance, the strangest romance indeed that could fall to the lot of a person who was guided by reason before all things. Granddaughter of the illustrious Captain d'Aubigné of the sixteenth century, daughter of a vicious and profligate father and of a wise and deserving mother, she experienced at an early age all the hardness of her lot and the fantastic changeableness of destiny ; but she had in her heart a drop of the generous blood of her grandfather, as well as his pride, and she would not have exchanged her condition for a happier one, if combined with less *quality*. As a child she accompanied her parents to Martinique. On her return, entrusted to the cares of a Calvinistic aunt, she was, though born a Catholic, thrown back into heresy, from which she had to be rescued by another relative, Mme de Neuillant, by means of an order of the Court. Placed in a convent at Niort, then at Paris, brought up by charity, the young Mademoiselle d'Aubigné, now quite an orphan, experienced every moment the oppressiveness of a dependent position. Mme de Neuillant, though so zealous for her spiritual good, was miserly to a degree, and begrudged her everything. However the young woman began during her visits to Paris to see the world, and her first steps were a success. It was the time 'of fine conversations, of fine gallantry, in a word, of what they called the *ruelles*.' Intellectual qualities easily gave one a position and almost a dignity. The young *Indian*, as they called her on account of her voyage to America, excited much remark at first sight, and did not lose by a closer examination. The Chevalier de Méré, a bel-esprit in vogue at the time, became her lover and teacher, and proclaimed her praises. He describes her even at that time as of an even and unvarying disposition on all occasions, 'very beautiful and of a

beauty that always pleases.' He recommended her to the Duchesse de Lesdiguières, who was travelling, for her resourcefulness and power of pleasing : 'She is *meek, grateful, discreet, faithful, modest, intelligent*, and, to crown her agreeable qualities, *she uses her intellectual power only to divert or to win love.*' When Mlle d'Aubigné, on her return to Poitou, wrote to her young friends in Paris, her letters circulated as masterpieces and helped to build up her budding reputation. It was about this time that she made acquaintance with Scarron the cripple, a man of so gay and, in the opinion of the time, so delicate a wit. To all the préciosité he saw around him Scarron offered an antidote of burlesque and humour. He saw Mlle d'Aubigné and had the merit of immediately becoming interested in her. After thinking it over, he found that the simplest way of showing this interest in her and doing her good was to marry her. She consented and gave her reason rather naïvely : 'I had rather marry him than a convent.' She never spoke of the *poor cripple* except with good feeling, with esteem, as a man of probity and kindly disposition little known to those who only saw his amusing sides. Here she was then at seventeen years of age (1652), in the first bloom of her beauty, married to an invalid husband for whom she could not care much, in the midst of the gayest and least scrupulous society, both in conversation and morals : it required quite a precocious art and a watchful discretion to gain consideration and respect in that youthful world of the Fronde. She was successful and served that early apprenticeship in prudence and circumspection, which was to be the profession and the pride of her whole life. On Scarron's death (1660), the situation of this beautiful widow of twenty-five, who had no resources, became more precarious, more dangerous than ever. Let us picture her in that first beauty which Mlle de Scudéry described so faithfully :

'*Lyriane* (that is Mme Scarron who, in *Célie*, is supposed to be the wife of the Roman *Scarrus*), *Lyriane* was tall and of a fine figure, but it was not a formidable tallness and only added to her good looks. She had a very smooth and beautiful complexion, light and very agreeable chestnut hair, a very well made nose, a well cut mouth, a noble, gentle, cheerful and modest air ; and, to render her beauty more perfect and more brilliant, she had the most beautiful eyes in the world. They were black, sparkling, soft, passionate, and full of intelligence ; their brilliancy

had something that cannot be expressed : gentle melancholy sometimes appeared in them with all the charms which almost always accompany it ; cheerfulness appeared in them in its turn with all the attractions which joy is able to inspire.'

All the witnesses of the time agree with regard to her beauty, her slender figure, her intelligence, and that mark of cheerfulness (*enjouement*) : ' All who know her, says the *Grand Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, are quite convinced that she is one of the most cheerful persons in Athens.' And she herself, towards the end of her life, represents herself as ' gay by nature and sad by condition.' That is a side which escapes us to-day and of which Mme de Maintenon's Letters only give us an inkling. Her Letters reflect only a portion of her intellectual qualities, good taste, good tone, perfect reason and a sometimes piquant expression ; but that which enlivened society, that gay tone which was discreetly mingled with her talk, her stories, the spark of brilliancy and wit that showed on her face when she spoke with animation, according to Choisy, all that had disappeared from her letters. We have as it were only the drawing and the engraving of Mme de Maintenon's wit, without the colouring.

There was, then, for Mme Scarron a critical moment after the death of her husband, but all her friends were eager to serve her and they succeeded. She had a pension from the Queen-Mother, and for several years she was able to enjoy a life sufficiently in accordance with her tastes. Residing in a convent near the Place Royale, she saw from there the best society ; she was incessantly at the Hôtel d'Albret and the Hôtel de Richelieu. When old and full of honours, she would speak of these years of her youth and poverty as the happiest of her life :

' The whole time of my youth was very pleasant, she said to her girls at Saint-Cyr : I had no ambition, nor any of those passions which might have troubled the penchant I had for that phantom of happiness (worldly happiness). For, although I experienced poverty and passed through conditions very different from that in which you see me now, I was contented and happy. I knew neither vexation, nor tedium ; I was free. I visited at the d'Albret and the Richelieu mansions, sure of being well received, and of finding my friends gathered there, or of attracting them to my dwelling, by advising them that I should be at home.'

Did Mme Scarron succeed in keeping herself quite blameless and sinless during these long years of widow-

hood and semi-worldliness? That question has formed the subject of discussions which appear to me rather idle and prompted by mere curiosity. I leave it to other more daring spirits to put their hands into the fire for questions of that kind: it is enough for me, and it should be enough for all who are desirous above all of getting at the whole character of the person, that Mme de Maintenon's line of conduct as a whole was full of reserve and propriety. The most serious testimony that can be brought up against her is a word of her friend Ninon, on the subject of M. de Villarceaux, their common friend; but, in this same bit of gossip, Ninon admits that she does not know how far things had gone, and that Mme Scarron always appeared to her 'too awkward for love.' There is praise, if you like, and almost a guarantee. The fact is, setting malice aside, that Mme Scarron, during these most perilous years, appears never to have been disturbed by her senses, never to have been urged by her heart, and that she was restrained by the two strongest checks of all, a love of consideration which, by her own confession, was her ruling passion, and a precise and practical religion, from which she never departed: 'I had,' she said, 'a great fund of religion, which prevented me from doing any wrong, which kept me from every weakness, which made me hate anything that might have made me an object of contempt.' I see no reason to doubt these words, saving an accident.

In these years of her youth, the principal feature of her character and her position in the world appears to have been as follows: she was one of those women who, as soon as they have gained a footing anywhere, immediately have the art and genius of making themselves welcome, of making themselves useful, essential, indispensable and at the same time pleasant on all occasions. As soon as she had penetrated into a family circle, she was as much at home as anybody could be, and, by reason of a sort of vocation or talent, she soon imperceptibly, and without any official title, took the lead in all habitual and everyday matters, whether in the household or in the drawing-room. Once received, in a word, she was always welcome; in speech as well as in action, she became the soul, the stand-by, the attraction of the place.

Such was Mme de Maintenon at the house of her friends,

Mme d'Heudicourt, Mme de Montchevreuil, such she was at the Hôtel d'Albret and the Hôtel de Richelieu; attentive to please all the world, and showing an industrious complaisance which Saint-Simon correctly observed and painted for the eyes as only he could do: for, in the midst of his exaggerations, his injustices and inaccuracies, there are (do not forget it) some great touches of moral truth in what he says of Mme de Maintenon; but in the explanation he gives of that zealous desire to please he is harder than he need be, and I will content myself with the explanation which Mme de Maintenon herself hints at. She represents herself (in her *Entretiens*) as hard-working, active, rising at six in the morning, taking up each occupation from a natural inclination and not through self-interest, and, as regards her women friends, anxious to oblige them also with a view to her own distinction, to gain their love, and from a spirit of self-esteem and glorification:

'But that cost me little pains, when I regarded the praise and the reputation which were to be the fruits of my constraint. That was my mania. I cared little for riches; I was raised far above self-interest: *I desired honour.*'

And again, speaking of that constraint which she imposed upon herself at all times, and that denial of all her inclinations to which she forced her nature:

'In my tender years, she says, I was what they call a good child, everybody loved me: *even my aunt's domestics were charmed with me.* When I was bigger, I was put into convents: you know how I was *cherished there by my mistresses and my companions,* always for the same reason, because, *from morning till evening, I thought of nothing else but to serve and oblige them.* When I was with that poor cripple, I was in the fine world, where I was sought after and esteemed. The women loved me because I was meek in society, and because I concerned myself much more about others than about myself. The men followed me because I had beauty and the graces of youth. I have seen something of everything, but always in such a way as to gain a blameless reputation. The liking I inspired was rather a general friendship, a friendship of esteem, than one of love. I did not desire to be loved in particular by anybody: *I wished to belong to all the world, I wished my name to be uttered with admiration and respect, I wished to play a fine part, and above all to win the approbation of good people: that was my idol.'*

This confession gives us the principal key to Mme de Maintenon's conduct during the whole of her earlier life: active, obliging, insinuating without any servility,

entering with an extreme sensibility into the troubles and embarrassments of her friends and coming to their assistance, not from a feeling of pure friendship, not from real sensibility, nor from a principle of tenderness and devotion, but because, anxious before everything to gain their good opinion and appreciation, she instinctively employed every means to raise herself to the highest degree in their esteem : that is how I picture her to myself. Material and positive interest was always a secondary consideration in her eyes, in spite of her straitened position, and she subordinated it to that other moral interest which was founded on the esteem in which she was held. She wanted to be singularly distinguished and admired by those with whom she associated, whoever they might be, and she wished it to be said of her : She is a unique person. That was her great coquetry, an intellectual coquetry ; as she advanced, it became an ambition and a career. Of an indefatigable constitution and a patience that was proved in every way, if you asked her to do a thing that was merely impossible to another, at the same time touching the cord of self-esteem and honour, she would do it. When, later, she had become the indispensable person in the private life at Versailles, the King's companion, the resource of the princes, the one person that no member of the royal family could do without for a single moment, she showed herself capable of miracles in suffering constraint and tedium. Entirely concerned about others, though she did not love them, she bore her incessant slavery with a good grace and a smile : 'I have lived twenty-six years,' she said, without saying a word that showed the slightest vexation.'

Towards the end, by one of those delusions of self-esteem which are so natural, she imagined that she had received singular graces for this new rôle, which was no more than the continuation, the perfecting and the crowning of all the other parts she had played since her youth ; she regarded her life in the light of a miracle. She had been so often told so, that she really looked upon herself as an Esther, intended by Providence to sanctify the King, though she herself should be a bit of a martyr. When the ladies of Saint-Cyr urged her during her last retreat to write her life, she refused, saying that it would be a story solely filled with marvellous quite inner

events : ' Only saints could take a pleasure in it.' She believed she was speaking humbly when she thus expressed herself. But there is no need to be a saint to take a pleasure in these secret springs of the heart, which she herself has so frankly unveiled.

Mme de Montespan was titular King's mistress, when, meeting Mme Scarron at the house of Mme d'Heudicourt, their mutual friend, and seeing her so active, so devoted, so discreet, so domestic so to say in all honour and with dignity, she could not help thinking what a valuable acquisition she would be if she could have her to bring up in secret the two natural children she had had by Louis XIV. In accordance with the ideas of the time, such a choice was a kind of honour. Mme Scarron however discriminated the equivocal elements in the case and accurately hit the mark : ' If they are the King's children, she replied responsively, I am quite willing ; I could not undertake without scruples the charge of Mme de Montespan's children ; so the King must command me ; that is my last word.' The King did command, and Mme Scarron became governess to the mysterious children.

She has painted herself admirably in the singular life that she led in these years (1670-1672). She took a large solitary house in the direction of Vaugirard, established herself there unknown to all her circle, looking after the precious children, presiding over their early education, their feeding, playing the part of governess, housekeeper, sick-nurse, everything in short, and reappearing in the mornings as if nothing unusual had happened, at the houses of her friends of the beau monde, for it was necessary at first that nobody should have any suspicion of her eclipse. By degrees however the secret was less rigorously kept and the clouds parted. The King, who used to come to see his children, made acquaintance with Mme Scarron ; but her first impression upon him was not favourable : ' The King disliked me very much at the beginning. He regarded me as a *bel-esprit* to whom it was necessary to say sublime things, and who was very hard to please in every way.' There was a time when Mme de Montespan had to make some effort to break the ice and to bring about a better understanding between the King and the object of her choice ; one may judge of the fury and bitterness that came after.

Here, in spite of all the explanations and artful apologies that may be brought forward, it can never be proved that Mme de Maintenon (for she had that title about this time), installed by Mme de Montespan, apparently taking an interest in her passion and all its vicissitudes, writing to her on the 13 March 1678 : 'The King is about to return to you, laden with glory, and I share infinitely in your joy,' did not at one time play a double game, and conceive a personally ambitious idea. No doubt she did not at the beginning conceive the idea of a thing that nobody could foretell, she assuredly did not say to herself that she would become the secret but acknowledged wife of the monarch : she only felt the possibility of a great influence and she aimed at it. This extraordinary romance was conducted and constructed thread by thread, by a cautious, patient and most skilful play. When once she has a footing at Court, Mme de Maintenon pretends that she was not born to live in that sphere and that she only remains with great reluctance. That is one of her ruses, by which she herself perhaps is half taken in. I cannot find a better comparison, in her perpetual plans and her threats of retreat, than that of M. de Chateaubriand, who, as we know, was always going to flee the world for a hermitage, and return to the American wilds : 'I would return to America, Mme de Maintenon would say, if I were not continually told that God wishes me to stay where I am.' She had a confessor, the Abbé Gobelin, who contrived to say to her very soon, pointing to the place (still a nameless place and by no means vacant, for the Queen was alive) that might be occupied at the side of Louis XIV : *God wishes you there!* Mme de Maintenon yielded to persuasion and remained, and nothing is more curious than to see her between the two mistresses of the King (Mme de Montespan and Mme de Fontanges), going from one to the other, reconciling, advising, patching up, secretly unstitching, interfering without appearing to do so, and over and above the bargain (that is her weakness and her method) asking for pity in her situation and continually threatening to retire. There never was a clever boaster more steeped in modesty and more wily. 'Nothing is more artful than an irreproachable conduct,' said Mme de Maintenon applying her words to her own conduct at the time. She is welcome

to applaud and absolve herself ; I can never call that virtue.

Through all this she did not neglect her real interest, her own influence. A woman of spirit and real honesty would not have accepted or sustained such a part for a single moment. Mme de Maintenon carried on this ambiguous scheme for years.

'The King has three mistresses, Mme de Montespan said to her furiously,—me in name, this *fille* (Fontanges) in fact, and you in heart.'

'This master sometimes comes to me, in spite of myself, and goes away again *in despair without being rebuffed*,' said Mme de Maintenon in her triumphant humility. Or again : 'I dismiss him *always grieved and never in despair*.' This continual making and unmaking of Penelope's web lasted about eleven years. Just try to imagine what cleverness in details is implied by this artful reserve that keeps alive and restrains desire so long without stifling it !

If, with a little reflexion, we can see here in Mme de Maintenon the most expert and the most consummately clever woman of forty-five in the art of weaving a plot, an intrigue half of sensuality, half of sentiment, under colour of religion and virtue, we must acknowledge also the intellectual talent she must have brought to it and the charms of conversation with which she beguiled, eluded and captivated a king less ardent than he had once been and who was astonished to find himself taking a pleasure in this new kind of procrastination. The Queen suddenly dying in 1683, Mme de Maintenon saw before herself a prospect of unexpected ambition, and she contrived to take advantage of it as she did of everything, with solidity, consideration and a cover of extreme modesty. She managed so well that she was secretly married to the King at a date which is supposed to be 1685. There were three or four persons, including her confessor, who called her *Your Majesty* behind closed doors : that was enough for her pride. It sufficed for her that, for all the rest, she was a unique personage, of undefined position and all the more respected, enjoying her greatness veiled behind the cloud and the wonderful sense of a destiny which showed sufficiently, as Saint-Simon says, under its *transparent enigma*. Here as in all things

there was that mixture of vainglory and modesty, of reality and self-sacrifice which was so much to her liking and which formed her dearest ideal.

With her own words, which always served so well her wonderfully straightforward wit, she defined her position one day at Saint-Cyr when somebody remarked to her, seeing that she was tired with walking, that she did not spare herself or behave like the great : ' It is because I am not *great*, she replied, I am only *elevated*.'

Of all Mme de Maintenon's portraits, that which gives us the best idea of her in that last and thoughtful attitude of a veiled greatness, is, in my opinion, the picture in the Queen's apartments at Versailles (No. 2258) : she is more than fifty years of age, she is all in black, grave, moderately stout, with a high and majestic brow under her veil. Her large, long, almond-shaped and very expressive eyes, are remarkably soft. The nose appears noble and charming ; the slightly open nostril might indicate strength. The mouth, small and graceful, is still fresh. Her rounded chin has a slight suggestion of doubleness. Her dress is all black, hardly varied by a drapery of white lace on the arms and shoulders. A high stomacher hides her neck. Such was the semi-regal Mme de Maintenon, at once imposing and contained, the woman who said : ' My condition never appears to me from its brilliant, but always from its painful and sombre side.'

In this exalted position, what service did Mme de Maintenon render to Louis XIV and to France ? To France, none—if we except the day when she asked Racine for a sacred comedy for Saint-Cyr. To Louis XIV in particular, she rendered the service of withdrawing him from those amours which his age might have made discreditable ; she contributed to the best of her power to what she religiously considered as his salvation. Humanly speaking, she filled up his time, she beguiled his moments as far as it was possible, and, once introduced into the royal family, she brought to it, with an increase of zeal and punctilioseness, that inexhaustible multiplication of herself which she had in her younger years brought to the Montchevreuils, the Heudicourts, the Richelieus. She was the essential person, the advising and consoling, the reasonable and at the same time agreeable person of that royal interior in the midst of all affairs

and afflictions. There lies her rôle and her function, much more than in politics, although she dipped her finger into them too much whenever family interests were concerned, as in the aggrandisement of the Duc du Maine. Louis XIV, it is well known, was very fair-minded : but, as he grew older, he was fair-minded without any activity and without any initiative, and only in respect of the matters that were submitted to him, and in so far as they were brought to his notice at the Council table ; he did not himself seek them beyond. Mme de Maintenon was also fair-minded, but only in a restricted circle, for family and society matters, for things that occurred in the interior of a chamber : she did not see or look beyond a definite horizon. That was the reason why, this horizon becoming narrowed with years, this King of good sense committed so many errors which this woman of such sound sense allowed him to do and approved.

Mme de Maintenon's fairness of mind was quite on a level with the King's : but his fairness was rather bare, hers was adorned and brightened up.

Did she love Louis XIV? It would be cruel to raise an absolute doubt on the point. It seems however that, of the two, it was he who loved her most, or at least to whom she was most necessary. We know that when he was dying, and had lost consciousness, she withdrew before he breathed his last. At the moment of quitting the dying man, she desired her confessor however to see the King and tell her whether there was any hope of his recovering consciousness.—' You may depart,' said her confessor, ' you are no longer necessary to him.'—She believed him, and obeyed, immediately leaving Versailles for Saint-Cyr. This conduct, for which she has been blamed, proves one thing : she was one of those women who, in those moments of separation and last farewell, still refer to their confessor, rather than take counsel of their own heart.

There was never a moment in all Mme de Maintenon's life when she entirely allowed her heart to speak ; that is the secret of the kind of coldness she inspires. Hers was the opposite of a sympathetic nature. It must be said that, during her long life and in the midst of the secret satisfactions of her self-esteem, she had constantly

to suffer and to constrain herself. Of her constraint and her slavery in the midst of her greatness, she has drawn pictures which are sincere and which make us almost pity her. From the hour of her rising till bed-time, she had not a minute, not an interstice of respite ; she was everything to everybody, everything to the princes for whom she continually put herself about, and to a King who would not have sacrificed the smallest of his habits even for the person he loved and considered most. Old, inconvenienced by the cold in those vast apartments, she could not take upon herself to place a screen around her arm-chair, for the King came there, and this irregularity of view would have displeased him : 'I had to perish in symmetry.' All the quarrels, all the dissensions of the royal family descended upon her head : 'I have just been drawn, not by four horses, but by four princes,' she said one day in her excessive weariness ; and, with the art on which she prided herself, she had to turn all these vexations into sources of amusement and humour : she herself retained only the thorns. Add the multitude of affairs that passed through her hands, especially those concerning religion and conscience, for she believed herself to be the *universal Abbess*, as Saint-Simon said ; and she calls herself the *business manager of the bishops*. She was the target of all requests and petitions : she eluded them as far as she could ; she said she was insignificant, a person of no consequence, without influence, an *Agnes* in politics ; they did not believe her, and importunities came from all parts, seized upon her in her passage, in spite of the care she took to make herself scarce and inaccessible : 'In truth, my head is sometimes ready to turn, she said at a moment when she found it intolerable, and I think that, if they opened my body after my death, they would find *my heart shrivelled and twisted* like M. de Louvois.' Let us not be too severe then in judging her poor heart, which she lays so bare.

She was right, in a sense, to compare herself with a Louvois, with great Ministers, men of great ambition : I do not believe that anybody ever carried so far as she did the spirit of consistency, the worship of consideration and the power of constraint.

Though a woman, she found some energetic words to describe that satiety of torments and anguish which she

had taken upon herself and which she had to hide behind a smile : 'I am sometimes full of them, as they say, *up to the gorge.*' It will be remembered that she one day said, looking at some unhappy little fishes that were restlessly moving about in their neat bowl of clear water : 'They are like me, *they long for their mud.*'

But it was at Saint-Cyr that Mme de Maintenon loved especially to take refuge whenever she had a moment to spare, to hide herself, to open her heart, to lament, to seek pity, to think over her incomprehensible elevation, to pose as a victim bearing on her own shoulders all the vexations of the kingdom : 'O ! tell me, she exclaimed, if the lot of *Jeanne Brindelette of Avon* (some poor peasant girl) is not preferable to mine ?'

Are those not the laments of a person of ambition and a miser, like those of Horace's usurer, who, after extolling the happiness of the country, quickly returns to town to invest his money at high interest ? When we hear from the lips of Mme de Maintenon the story of those royal grievances and when we remember her starting-point in the past, we are sometimes inclined to say with a smile, as in *Tartufe* : '*La pauvre femme ! la pauvre femme !*' And after listening to her a little longer, we end by saying seriously with her : *Yes, a poor woman indeed !* Towards the end she visibly had enough of it ; physical fatigue got the better of everything else, and Louis' death was, to some extent, a relief to her.

For two things only she deserves great commendation in the eyes of posterity : for the foundation of Saint-Cyr, and for her talent as an excellent writer. Saint-Cyr would require a special study. Mme de Maintenon stamped it with her intellect, and there she shines in a frame made expressly for her. There she can satisfy her passion for educating, for lecturing those around her, her mania for playing the Minerva and the Mentor which grows with age, and at the same time she there finds relaxation and a little outlet for her tenderness. It is her work, her own cherished, almost maternal labour : 'Nothing is dearer to me than my children at Saint-Cyr ; *I love everything about them, even their dust.*' An institution founded with the aim of bringing up poor young people in pure and regular principles is always so fine a thing, that we hesitate to criticise it, even respectfully. Louis XV however, who

did not lack judgment, was severe in the matter of Saint-Cyr : ' Mme de Maintenon, he said, greatly erred with excellent intentions. These girls are brought up in such a way that they must all be made ladies of the Palace, else they are unhappy and impertinent.'¹ I should not be surprised, indeed, if a little vainglory had not slipped into this institution formed under the unique influence of Mme de Maintenon. Let it suffice to recall to-day, to the honour of Saint-Cyr, that it was at its birth the occasion of *Esther* and *Athalie*. Such accidents are calculated to immortalise a cradle.

It is after all *as a writer* that Mme de Maintenon has all our durable esteem. We have no complete and entirely correct edition of her Letters, but what we have enables us to found a judgment and confirms what Saint-Simon said so well of that ' agreeable, correct language, in good terms, and naturally eloquent and brief.' This character of happy brevity and concision is peculiar to Mme de Maintenon, and is only shared by Mme de La Fayette. Both of them put an end to the dragging, careless, irregular style which the women (when they were not Mme de Sévigné) too much indulged in in the seventeenth century. Mme de Maintenon contributed as much as anybody to bring about that reform which the eighteenth century inherited : ' I will correct the faults of style which you remark in my letters, the Duc du Maine wrote to her ; but I think that long sentences will be for me a long fault.' Mme de Maintenon speaks and writes in perfection. Every word hits its mark, and there is not a fold in the style. A single point more, and it would be stiff and dry. Mme Du Deffand, who is of the same school in literature, has very well described the effect of Mme de Maintenon's Letters, and they could not be better defined :

' Her Letters are thoughtful, she says ; they have much wit, in a very simple style ; but they are not animated, and they are far from being as agreeable as those of Mme de Sévigné ; all is passion, all is in action in the Letters of the latter : she shares in everything, everything affects her, everything interests her ; Mme de Maintenon, on the contrary, relates the greatest events, in which she played a part, with the most perfect sang-froid ; we see that she loved neither the King, nor her

¹ *Mémoires de Madame du Haussel.*

friends, nor her kinsfolk, nor even her place ; without feeling, without imagination, she has no illusions, she knows the intrinsic value of all things ; she is weary of life, and she says : *Only death can clearly put an end to vexations and misfortunes.* . . . After reading her letters I have a high opinion of her intelligence, little esteem for her heart, and no liking for her person ; but, I maintain, I persist in not believing her false.'

She does not appear false, indeed, in her Letters, she is only discreet and a little close. To complete our idea of Mme de Maintenon, we must, when reading her, add a certain cheerfulness of reason, a certain living charm which she had to the last, even in her austerity ; which was bound up with her personality, her desire to please in presence of others, but which did not go so far as to be fixed in writing.

I have however only made a beginning with Mme de Maintenon. One does not advance quickly with her : I shall return to her some day and consider her in tête-à-tête with Mme des Ursins.

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Mondav, 4 August 1851.

'We are like the rivers, which keep their name, but whose waters are always changing.' It was the great Frederick who wrote this to d'Alembert, to express the change that time works in the feelings and thoughts of each individual. If ever the soul of man could be compared to the changing and rapid current, it surely can be at the present moment: the great poets of our age, in particular, are great rivers, and M. de Lamartine is the broadest and finest of them all. How many banks he has already reflected!

'I have hardly passed the middle of life, he says in the Preamble to his History, and I have already lived under ten dominions, or under ten different governments in France.' And he enumerates all the governments that have succeeded each other these last sixty years, beginning with Louis XVI. But I have heard people, after reading this first sentence of M. de Lamartine, ask what the historian meant by *the middle of life*, and whether, indeed, we were still justified in measuring the space of our days and the number of the suns that have been granted to us, as if we lived in the times of the patriarchs. It is impertinent to speak of age and date to a woman, but we are justified in exacting an accurate account from the historian: chronology, like geography, is one of the eyes of history. Certainly only by a poetic licence could M. de Lamartine present himself to us, at the very opening of his work, in the light of so flattering a chronology. He, the historian of the Restoration, could not say, for example, of Louis XVIII in 1814, or of M. de Talleyrand, whom he calls at that date an old diplomat, that they

¹ *History of the Restoration*, by M. de Lamartine (vols. i and ii).

had hardly passed the middle of life. Very well! M. de Lamartine is now, if I am not mistaken, at least as old as Louis XVIII and M. de Talleyrand were in 1814. I only dwell on this opening sentence, which has set many people wondering, to show that we cannot reasonably expect of the historian-poet a great and scrupulous accuracy on these points of detail and humble reality. When reality inconveniences him, he lightly bends it to the exigencies of the sentence and of harmony. For my part, in these two volumes that I have just read with pleasure and ardour, I know very well that I have not found a single date either in the margin or in the text.

What matter? the two volumes are interesting, and the subject suits M. de Lamartine in many respects. It suits him much better than that of his first *Histoire des Girondins*. This *Histoire des Girondins*, which was so fatally successful, was a great snare that the poet set for himself before he set it for others. Indeed, even though M. de Lamartine, with his ideal talent, with his natural yet calculated optimism, were fitted to be an historian, was he fitted to be the historian of the French Revolution in particular? Could all that azure, those floods of light and colour, those golden and sky-blue backgrounds, to which we are accustomed in his poetry, and which he transfers, hardly veiled, to his prose, harmonise with the pictures he had to offer us? I know that M. de Lamartine has many strings to his lyre, that he is not limited to the voluptuous and effeminate string. In a fine poem of his second *Méditations*, which he calls *Les Préludes*, he exhibits himself from four or five different points of view, by turns nonchalant, dreamy, then in love with the tempests, then carried away into battles, then returning to his Arcadia to the sound of the shepherd's pipe. Like all great poets, M. de Lamartine has several souls, he has even said somewhere that he has seven (the number is unimportant); and he has indeed proved, in famous moments, that energy, power, a sudden heroic vigour blended with a flash of eloquence, are not foreign to him. But, after all, whatever he may do and however much he may try to transform himself, the primitive and dominant tones in him are still tones of brilliancy, harmony and light. Now, the mere application of a talent of that order and that quality to such a subject,

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to those hideous natures and those livid pictures of the Revolution, was in itself a first cause of delusion and imperceptible seduction, a first falsehood. See then what he did : he disguised the horror, he threw an enchantment over the picture. He slipped over it a corner of that moon of Cape Misenum which he always holds in reserve on the edge of a cloud, and which beautifies everything it touches. Across that blood and mire he has cast the remains of a milky way and a rainbow. His colour lies. Even when forcing and spoiling his manner, he did not attain to the reality of what he desired to paint, or he overstepped it. Instead of a real and deep horror, he produced by his descriptions, as in a novel, only a kind of almost nervous impression. I wondered, on seeing this effect of the *Girondins* especially on women readers, if that was the effect which history ought to produce. I will not say that that work on the *Girondins* moves, but it *emotions* : a bad word, a bad thing.

I leave aside, as the reader may see, the political aim, the perhaps calculated intention, and I confine myself to the literary colour which is almost involuntary and inevitable in the kind of talent possessed by M. de Lamartine. He has been blamed for his sudden fits of indulgence and the complaisance of his brush for Robespierre and other monsters. For my part, in spite of all the proofs of talent, of natural genius, of wit even and sagacity which M. de Lamartine gives in the floating pages and the unfinished frescoes of his Histories, I shall not be surprised at any confusion or any *lapsus* of the brush in one who, having occasion to speak of Camille Desmoulin and his *Vieux Cordelier*, contrived to compare him with Fénelon. Yes, M. de Lamartine one day compared Camille Desmoulin to Fénelon : after that can we be astonished at his errors of tact and his accidents of touch ?

Happily, in the *History of the Restoration*, he has to do, I will not say with more present memories, for he remembers little and his memory is docile to his imagination, but he has to do with more respectable people, with persons more worthy in general of his colours. He has seen them, he has associated with them, he judges them to-day, after having been one of them, and he still retains something about them. His delicacy of observation will often

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mingle with his recollections and will correct the inadvertences of his brush. His *Histoire des Girondins* offended many of M. de Lamartine's old acquaintances, as a defection and an encouraging and baneful seduction. In his *Histoire de la Restauration* M. de Lamartine returns to the first scenes of his younger days, and, although he returns to them with a complete freedom of views, he will be sufficiently able to seize the emotions and the tone : he will embellish them perhaps ; but, whether he shows himself more or less indulgent or severe, he cannot here be dangerous. In short, whatever he may do (to speak as they did in the seventeenth century), he will still retain on this occasion much of the *honest man*.

The two volumes actually published already prove it. These volumes, I repeat, are interesting, in spite of their numerous faults, their carelessness and licence in composition. I will peruse them rapidly, less as a critic than as an eager reader, at once fascinated and resisting, who, to check these facile pages, has had to refer mainly to his own memories.

In this History M. de Lamartine follows the division by books, and the books are themselves divided, not into chapters (the word is too vulgar), but by ciphers, by numbers, by those kinds of epic couplets which are so fashionable nowadays. I confess that in serious history I do not much like this kind of division and cutting ; it is what I call history in stanzas, it is a perpetual wager to be eloquent and to dramatise the story. History, in its simple gravity and in the natural course of its progress, should not be under this continual necessity ; it should not recommence almost at every page, and throw itself into the attitude of a Pindar or a tribune.

The *History of the Restoration* begins by being a history of the end of the Empire. The Napoleon of the last years is painted with touches in which M. de Lamartine has combined his new style with some of his old prejudices ; he has retranslated his old poetry into his modern manner. The Bonaparte of the second *Méditations* reappears the same under a different shape and commented upon by history. But, in this portrait of the Napoleon of 1812, M. de Lamartine has abandoned himself too much to his new prose style, into which there enters more of Balzac than of Tacitus, I mean Balzac the novelist :

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'The Empire has aged him prematurely,' says the historian : satisfied ambition, satiated pride, the delights of the palaces, an exquisite table, a soft couch, young wives, flattering mistresses, long nights, sleeplessness divided between labour and fêtes, the habit of riding which thickens the body (*all this is imitation of Tacitus*) had dulled his limbs and enervated his senses. A precocious obesity loaded him with flesh. His cheeks, once veined with muscles and hollowed by the consumption of genius, were full, broad, overflowed like Otho's on the Roman coins of the Empire. A tint of bile mingled with blood yellowed the skin, and from a distance gave a sort of pale gold veneer to the face. His lips still had their Attic curve and their firm grace, readily passing from a smile to a threat. *His solid and bony chin easily bore the base of the features.* His nose was only a thin and transparent line. The pallor of the cheeks gave greater brilliancy to the blue of the eyes. His glance was deep, mobile as a restless flame, as an uneasiness. *His brow seemed to have widened under the nudity of the thin black hair, half-fallen under the moistness of a continuous thought.* (Here Tacitus makes way for Balzac). One might have thought that his head, naturally small, had grown bigger to leave more scope between the temples for the wheel works and the combinations of a soul every thought of which was an empire. *The chart of the Globe seemed to be incrusted on the world-map of that head.* But it was beginning to subside.'

How should I have any confidence in such a portrait, when I see the rhetorician, the writer in love with metaphor and reduplication, showing through to that extent ? That is not a portrait, it is a caricature of the Napoleon of 1812.

Face to face with this, to lay bare the process, I will show the portrait of Louis XVIII, which M. de Lamartine gives us in the second volume. After depicting him in his ordinary dress, with his velvet boots, his coat of blue cloth, and after thus describing his head : 'His hair, artistically twisted and turned up by the curling-tongs on the temples, was confined behind the neck in a black silk ribbon flowing over his collar' (which means, without any periphrasis, that he had a *queue*) ; after adding, still speaking of his head : 'It was powdered white after the fashion of our fathers, and thus concealed the whiteness of age under the artificial snow of the toilet.' the painter comes to the character of the person and to the face :

'One might have thought 'hat time, exile, fatigues, infirmities, the heavy obesity of his nature, had only fastened upon the feet and the trunk to set off better the eternal and vigorous youthfulness of the face. One could not weary of admiring and studying him. The high forehead sloped back a little too much like a sinking wall, but the light played upon it like intelligence in a broad and bulky space. The large eyes, sky-blue, in an orbit oval as the angles and raised at the summit, luminous, sparkling, humid, had a frankness. . . . The healthy colour, and the vivid freshness of adolescence tinged the visage.'

The whole portrait of Louis XVIII is treated with this exaggeration and this caricature in a different sense, *in a favourable direction*. In order that both portraits might be true and really like, one could no doubt retain many of the features, and it would almost suffice in every case to reduce them; but it is precisely this reduction that M. de Lamartine has taken good care not to make, and which is contrary to his present manner, the secret of which is to amplify everything, to carry everything to excess and to aim at effect.

When reading these pages of M. de Lamartine and finding every moment happy, broad, elevated and even shrewd expressions (for there is more shrewdness and wit properly speaking than one would think, there is even slyness in some passages), we experience a keen regret: namely that rhetoric, the habit and need of extending, of forcing and spinning out, spoils these excellent thoughts and touches: 'For the last two years, he says of Napoleon, his return to Paris, once triumphal, had been sudden, nocturnal, sad. He would arrive unexpectedly, as if he wished to surprise or forestall a revolution.' That is excellent historical style. Immediately after, describing M. de Metternich during a negotiation: 'M. de Metternich was sincere, says the historian, for he was interested.' There again is an excellent style of observation and of portrait-painting. All that these touches, so frequent in M. de Lamartine, and perpetually occurring by a happy chance to his pen, need, to appear really beautiful, is to be laid upon a solid and well-constructed background, upon a studied, laboured and serious background. In an ordinary, reflective and rational style, how many of these thoughts would remain great or charming! But they are betrayed by what follows, and shown to be only happy accidents, as it were, and the play of a superior rhetoric. Lack of care is revealed at every step. Speaking of Napoleon with severity, and in this case, I think, with supreme injustice, he says: 'There was a recollection of the Terror of 1793 in the government of this man, who had lived, grown up and associated with the men of that time (*qui avait vécu, grandi et pratiqué les hommes de ce temps*).' M. de Lamartine must have thought out this idea before writing it, but he certainly did not read over his sentence, for the style of it is grammatically impossible.

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M. de Lamartine has some fine portraits, even in his first book : he meets with M. Lainé, the first who dared to raise a voice of legal resistance and of liberty at the decline of the Empire. M. de Lamartine is here again in the midst of that company of respectable people of whom I have spoken : he must have a particular liking for M. Lainé : it was he whom, under the Restoration, he was ambitious of following, at the time of that still noble, elevated, royalist and somewhat independent policy, inspired by generosity and sentiment. M. Lainé is generally very well painted by M. de Lamartine, saving one point, which appears to me to be emphasised in a very absolute manner : 'He was not of the party of the Bourbons, M. de Lamartine says of M. Lainé in 1814. he was a Republican by nature and inclination. *Reason alone afterwards made him serve kings.*' I leave it to those who knew M. Lainé in his maturity to estimate this part of his character ; but I am afraid that in making him a Republican *in petto*, M. de Lamartine remembers too well that he had at first taken M. Lainé for his model, and that he is trying after the event to make M. Lainé a Lamartine in the bud who only needed time to develop. When M. de Lamartine comes across these political personages for whom he has a liking and an affection, whether their names be Vergniaud, Mirabeau or Lainé, he is unconsciously apt to project a little of his own face into theirs, to lightly draw his own profile, so to say, upon theirs. There are many of these Jocelyn-like profiles in his Histories.

Raynouard, Cambacérès, Barbé-Marbois, Fontanes, are painted in passing, and all these portraits contain some portions that are treated in a superior manner, some delicate and charming details. Here, however, as in everything that M. de Lamartine does, the *approximate* slips in. Barbé-Marbois, who has been called a reed painted to look like iron, was not a *daring* old man. Raynouard, though rather rude on the surface and in manners, was not as *savage* as M. de Lamartine makes him. The word *mediocre* applied to Fontanes as a poet is unjust, and doubly so coming from M. de Lamartine, who seems here to be taking his revenge upon Fontanes, his precursor, for his severities. M. de Lamartine is a great poet, Fontanes was only a *distinguished* poet ; that is the word

that M. de Lamartine should have hit upon if he had been ever so careful in choosing his words, and if his pen were not at the mercy of the first word it comes across. Cambacérès is presented with shrewdness and humour, in a quite witty and amusing manner : only the name *Alcibiades*, applied to him, is superfluous. But it is in the painting of general situations rather than in that of individuals that we must count on M. de Lamartine. His historical books are not and never will be anything but vast and specious *approximations* in which circulates here and there the general spirit of things, in which come and go those great currents of the atmosphere which the migrating birds scent in advance, beating their wings, and which the poets, those migrating birds too, likewise scent.

Before coming to the first scenes of the Restoration, M. de Lamartine involves himself in an account of the campaign of 1814. Here he is lengthy and not very lucid, since he gives neither dates nor precise geographical descriptions ; he is more severe than we could wish. We are astonished to see him trying to remake the plan of Napoleon's campaign, dictating to him another, regretting that he did not follow it, and underrating, as far as in him lies, the miracles of that glorious end. When he appears to be so obstinately sparing and niggardly with his praises and sympathies for the conqueror who has again become the heroic soldier of the fatherland, Lamartine forces us to remember that he was one of those who had attained manhood at the time, that he was nearly twenty-four years of age in 1814, and that he was not among those improvised soldiers who were roused up by the national feeling, and engendered by the native soil around that flag whose colours he has since saved.

However, M. de Lamartine's superior and spontaneously generous nature appears in the impartiality of some of his appreciations : to Marmont, Duke of Ragusa, he renders due justice for his defence of Paris, and clears him of the reproach of treachery by determining his share of error and weakness, common at the time to many others less gravely accused. When the hour of the Restoration comes, M. de Lamartine cannot help however again becoming the man of 1814, and saluting the veritable era from which he dates his being and in which he, in common

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with all of us, received his baptism of intellect : 'The reign of swords was ending, he says, that of ideas was about to commence.'

The still living politicians who witnessed those great events of 1814, the arrival of the allies before Paris, the negotiations which ended in the re-establishment of the Bourbons, and who shared or were in any degree mixed up with those councils of the sovereigns, will no doubt leave us some credible and detailed accounts of them ; these men will certainly find much to criticise in many points of M. de Lamartine's vast exposés. But as long as he confines himself to general facts and tableaux, he seems to exhibit them in a sufficiently faithful light. For the details and the outline of the narrative, he has continually drawn upon the accounts of two historians who preceded him, and who made more accurate and more positive researches than he was accustomed to make. M. de Vaulabelle in the purely Liberal direction, and M. Lubis in the Royalist sense, recorded those great events before M. de Lamartine ; and it is curious to see how the latter, whilst openly acknowledging his obligations, turns both writers to account, unites them, intertwines them, combines them by translating them into his own language and covering them with his own colour. He throws over the whole a breath of eloquence and poetic intelligence that is quite his own.

With regard to M. Lubis' History, I have however before me too precise a proof of the use M. de Lamartine made of it not to say something about it, the more so as it throws a light on M. de Lamartine's whole historical method, and explains the secret of that rapidity which, in a complicated and severe branch of study, is so calculated to astonish.

M. Lubis published in 1837 and the following years, a carefully prepared *History of the Restoration*, which is not a compilation, but a studied composition founded on the sources. The copy of M. Lubis' book belonging to the National Library was lent to M. de Lamartine, who thought proper to mark with ink (for greater brevity) the passages he intended to borrow : I have this copy in my hands with the passages indicated, and the words *fin* or *finir là* written in the hand of the rapid historian. The copy will become valuable to the National Library, and I have

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found it of great use in getting at the secret of M. de Lamartine's manner of composing history. I give here the result of my study.

For all the incontestable parts and the texts of the political documents which historians ordinarily seek at the source, which they borrow from the *Moniteur* and other publications, and from which they generally make extracts after reading the whole, M. de Lamartine has contented himself with taking these extracts purely and simply as they were already made by M. Lubis, without the addition or omission of a word, and without checking them. When he had to quote the proclamations of the Provisional Government (Vol. I, p. 257), the Observations of M. de Villèle to the Deputies of Toulouse (vol. II, p. 320), a certain Memorandum attributed to Fouché (vol. II, p. 298), the Memorandum of Carnot to the King (vol. II, p. 438); when he wanted to analyse the first legislative debates, to quote the speech of the Abbé de Montesquieu in the discussion of the Press Law (vol. II, p. 348), the speeches of MM. Ferrand, Bédoch, Lainé and Maréchal Macdonald, in the discussion on the property of the Émigrés (vol. II, pp. 359-370), M. de Lamartine has simply laid M. Lubis under contribution, commencing where he commences, interrupting himself where he interrupts himself, stopping where he ends.¹ Only where the latter says simply, apropos of a noble speech of M. Lainé, President of the Chamber, on the property of the Émigrés : 'M. Lainé left the chair, and, for the first time since the opening of the session, appeared in the tribune'; M. de Lamartine says more magnificently : 'M. Lainé, stirred from his President's seat by the emotion of the honest man, appeared in the tribune. . . .' On other occasions however, the eloquent second-hand historian is less happy, and, wishing to quote after M. Lubis an extract from Carnot's Memorandum to the King (vol. II, p. 438), he makes a mistake, or rather his copyist makes a mistake in transcribing, and gives us as forming part of Carnot's text two or three sentences which M. Lubis had added by way of comment. But these are trifles : what remains important and clear, is the general ex-

¹ Compare with all the passages cited above of M. de Lamartine's History, the corresponding passages in M. Lubis' History, in vol. I, pages 294, 319, 328; vol. II, pages 62, 99, 101, 103, 106, 159.

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peditious process of composing. It is such that I might point out in advance certain pages of M. Lubis which will be found in the not yet published volumes of M. de Lamartine's History, for the same indications in ink make known that they were intended to be transcribed like the preceding ones.

By carefully reading the first volumes of M. de Vaulabelle's work, we might likewise discover the use that M. de Lamartine has made of it: for example, when describing the departure of Louis XVIII from Hartwell for France and his solemn entry into London (vol. ii, p. 255), he has mixed up the positive and less favourable indications given by M. de Vaulabelle (such as Louis XVIII's reply to the Prince Regent) with the other quite royalistic impressions of M. Lubis. But over all this we may say that he has thrown his gold-dust and poured his torrent of colours.

When he threw his gold-dust and his azured tints over the documents of the *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution* of MM. Buchez and Roux, M. de Lamartine committed an offence against the truth and almost an historical crime. Here, when pouring out the treasures of his palette over these first scenes of the Restoration, his action does little harm and is in the order of legitimate emotions.

A mere hint, furnished by the historians who preceded him, becomes under his illusive pen the theme and matter of a most magnificent picture. M. Lubis, describing the crossing of Louis XVIII from Dover to Calais, said in a few lines: 'The crossing was quick. Louis XVIII again saw the land of France; the acclamations of his people reached him. Soon he is able to greet this people that calls him. Placed on the forepart of the ship, he extends his arms to them, and a thousand shouts of joy reply to this sign of tenderness.' M. de Lamartine is not satisfied with this, and sees in these few lines only a theme for a picturesque composition which occupies two or three fine pages of his work: '*Standing on the lofty prow of the vessel, leaning on the faithful companions of his proscription, surrounded by the new France that had repaired to meet him, he extended his arms to the shore and closed them upon his heart, raising his eyes to heaven as if to embrace his country. He shewed at his sides Madame*

la Duchesse d'Anglouême, etc., etc.' We see the group. In this way, or nearly so, the things must have happened, and in this way M. de Lamartine recomposed them to make them render all their effect in the eyes of the new generations. With these pictures he minglest rapid reflexions, moral or political views, often judicious and profound. Thus, on the occasion of this first return of Louis XVIII, this journey from Calais to Compiègne, he shows how the country readily forgets its rights in the midst of the general emotion, and gives itself heart and soul, while the politicians at Paris are still stipulating and haggling : ' He (Louis XVIII) felt, by the universal and spontaneous thrill which ran through his country, that he was master of this people, and that they would not seriously dispute over the price of his reign at Paris. It was evident to him and to all that if the trusting and versatile country had been alone face to face with its King, the King could have arbitrarily and without any resistance dictated the conditions of the new compact between the throne and the people ; the Emperor Alexander stipulated in favour of liberty more than liberty, at the time, stipulated for itself.' Those are fine and just thoughts, admirably expressed. And after describing the first entry of the allied troops into Paris on the 31 March 1814, M. de Lamartine, showing how curiosity succeeds grief as they advance into the brilliant quarters and along the boulevards, said : ' Everything is a spectacle for such a city, even its own humiliation.' When a man has written and thought such words, he ought to be cured, it seems to me, of the ambition of playing the part of the tribune, the popular and ambitious orator.

The only superior element in M. de Lamartine's Histories, which it would be unjust to overlook in spite of all their deficiencies and inaccuracies, is the strong sense of the general situations, the spirit of the great days and the crowds, that spirit which the poet still more than the historian embraces and gathers in his soul, with which he minglest and blends, and whose principal electrical currents he excels in tracing in words full of emotion, in vibrating and sonorous waves. The double influence that prevailed from the beginning, the double contrary inspiration of Louis XVIII and the Comte d'Artois are very well outlined by M. de Lamartine.

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The first tentative acts of the royal government and the first babblings of the reign of publicity and discussion are equally well grasped and rendered with a justness full of breadth. To have their full value, these pages only need to be framed in a firm, exact, sustained historical text.

But all is disproportionate : the second volume contains endless biographies of all the members of the royal family, beginning with Louis XVIII and ending with the Duc d'Enghien. All these portraits are fascinating at first sight, and display some happy touches, some fresh colours : but as a rule they are exaggerated and overstep the limits of moderation. There is a perceptible moment when the writer poetises them and *romances* them ; I know no other word. He goes into excessive details in describing the personality and the physique of his models ; he goes so far as to trace the smallest reflexions at the angles of the eyes and at the brow : nobody ever saw so many things in a face. If I had to do with a Dutch painter in M. de Lamartine, I should consider that he goes too far, but I should at least have confidence in him. In this case I am too sensible of having to do with mere luxuriance of the brush, which disports itself and exaggerates, which caresses all things and draws them out in every direction. The portrait of the Duchesse d'Angoulême especially offended me by a spurious expression of *charms* and a lavishness of *colouring* which is in contradiction with the elevated, severe and almost austere character of a figure so calculated to inspire nothing but respect. The Duchesse d'Angoulême is one of those personages that are sanctified by misfortune, and with whom the brush should not trifle, even to flatter them. She is not a subject for a Lawrence, but for a Holbein or a Rembrandt, to paint.

I was almost forgetting a portrait of the Empress Marie-Louise, which is quite a rehabilitation and a revelation : she is depicted as pathetic, poetic, a sentimental Tyrolese, *her glance full of dreams, inner and mysterious horizons*. It is not to be believed. M. de Lamartine knew Marie-Louise in Italy. I should need however to be assured by somebody with less talent that the resemblance is real. Since I have seen that M. de Lamartine finds beauty in all the women and talent in all the men

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of his acquaintance, and that he compares some of them with Horace or Phædo, I require some guarantees.

By an irregularity of composition, and as a sort of excrescence, M. de Lamartine placed at the end of his second volume, that is to say under the date of 1814 and before the Hundred Days, a tableau of the literature, the poetry, the philosophy and all the branches of thought, produced and published in the course of the Restoration. It was only about 1818 however that these divers intellectual riches, which were to honour the period of fifteen years, commenced to loom for the most part in the persons of their young representatives. Under M. de Lamartine's pen, a tableau of the literary grandeur and beauties of the Restoration period must necessarily be incomplete, since he himself is wanting; for he cannot well assign to himself the place that he deserves, that is to say one of the foremost, and announce that among the influences of the time, that which he exercised was assuredly the most penetrating, the most living and the dearest, the most sympathetic of all. In this rapid tableau, where, as always, he gives proof of generosity and good-will, and into which he has introduced more than one witty and ingenious remark, M. de Lamartine has committed himself to a few little confused and mixed statements which show that the critical mind in him has still some progress to make, even in subjects with which he ought to be most familiar. Mme de Staél and Chateaubriand are broadly appreciated, and the latter with an unaccustomed firmness. But I am astonished to see M. de Bonald celebrated as a *man of character*, when that honest man was, in general, very subservient to domestic circumstances, which, on more than one occasion, made him an instrument of power, sincere, but by no means disinterested. I am still more surprised to see Comte Joseph de Maistre, whom M. de Lamartine knew nevertheless, compared to *Montaigne*. In another place M. de Lamartine says that the *Minerve* was the *Satyre Ménippée of the Restoration*; but the *Satyre Ménippée*, which the historian has no doubt forgotten, was written in favour of Henri IV by honest royalists, and the *Minerve* was not written, if I remember right, with a view to consolidating the throne of the Bourbons. M. de Lamartine compares the aristocratic salon of the Duchesse de Duras to a

salon of the Fronde: that means confounding all the shades in judging a society where shades were precisely everything. Elsewhere I see Marie-Joseph Chénier, who died in 1811, and Mme Cottin, who died in 1807, ranked among the writers of the Restoration. The latter are generally thrown together into a heap reminding one of the dish that the Spaniards call an *Escudilla*, a real hotchpotch. Speaking in this chapter, apropos of Mme de Montcalm's salon, of Pozzo di Borgo, that witty Corsican, a general and diplomat in the Russian service, M. de Lamartine calls him a 'veritable Athenian Alcibiades, long exiled to the dominions of Prusias.' We wonder what business *Alcibiades* and *Prusias* have together, and perceive that the author, in the rapidity of his allusions, must have confounded Alcibiades with Hannibal. But these are trifles again, of little importance: we have long given M. de Lamartine up for lost, and have ceased to offer him any advice; we must content ourselves, when reading him, to take advantage of all the happy things that still escape from the rapidity and the carelessness of his genius.

NOTE.—We read in the *Indépendance belge* of about the 15 August 1851: 'A letter from M. de Lamartine makes known, it says, how much he was offended by the article published by M. Sainte-Beuve on his *History of the Restoration*. M. de Lamartine relates, it says, in his reply, that, on the 16 April, 'his day and not that of General Changarnier,' he met M. Sainte-Beuve, who said to him, in one of the little streets in the neighbourhood of the Hotel de Ville and in presence of M. Payer: 'To-day you have been greater than Napoleon!'

If M. de Lamartine said that, he was indulging one of those delusions and exaggerations of memory which are familiar to him: for it is impossible that I could have said such a thing, never having been in the habit of mixing Napoleon up with everything and making him a measure of my admiration: it would have been the first time that I had used such language. But, whatever I may have said on that day to M. de Lamartine, and even though, following the example of so many others, I had inadvertently said something foolish, what, I pray you, have such words to do with a critical article as motived as that you have just read, and in which there is moreover, it seems to me, a good residue of admiration? Chance, or rather my natural curiosity, led me to write down for my own benefit, on the same evening, the account of my meeting and my conversation with M. de Lamartine: I have no intention of communicating it to the public, who must be sick for the moment of these kinds of confidences. I will merely remark that M. de Lamartine's wound must have been very sore to make him have recourse to weapons so unworthy of him.

MARY STUART¹

Monday, 11 August 1851.

'WELL, they may say what they will—many a true heart will be sad for Mary Stewart, e'en if all be true men say of her.' This judgment, which Walter Scott puts into the mouth of one of the characters in his novel (*The Abbot*), to prepare the reader for his introduction to the beautiful Queen, remains the last word both of posterity and of her contemporaries, the conclusion come to both by history and poetry. Elizabeth triumphed in her lifetime, and her policy triumphs after her and still reigns, in so much that Protestantism and British Empire are one and the same thing. Mary succumbed in her person and that of her descendants; Charles I under the axe, James II in exile, continued and increased her inheritance of faults, indiscretions and calamities: the whole race has been cut off, and appeared to merit this fate. But, vanquished in the order of real things and under the empire of fact, or even that of inexorable reason, the fair Queen has won back everything in the domain of imagination and pity. There she has found, from century to century, knights, lovers, avengers. A few years ago, a Russian of distinction, Prince Alexander Labanoff, set about searching with an incomparable zeal, in the archives, the collections and libraries of Europe, for all the documents emanating from Mary Stuart, the most important and the least of her letters, in order to unite them into a body of history, and to make them an authentic reliquary, doubting not that a more powerful interest, a more serious and tender interest, would spring from the bosom of truth itself. It was

¹ *Marie Stuart*, by M^r. Mignet. (2 vols. 1851.)

apropos of this Collection of Prince Labanoff that M. Mignet published in the *Journal des Savants*, from 1847 to 1850, a series of articles in which, not content with appraising the documents produced, he introduced on his own account new and hitherto unpublished documents, and brought fresh light to bear on the subject. Since then, abandoning the form of criticism and dissertation, M. Mignet has resumed this noble subject as a whole and has drawn up a narrative, complete, serious, concise, interesting and definitive, which he has just published.

In the interval, and about a year ago (1850), appeared a *History of Mary Stuart* by M. Dargaud, a writer of talent, whose book has been much commended and read. M. Dargaud has made, in his own way, many researches touching his chosen heroine : for this purpose he travelled to England and Scotland, making pilgrimages to all the places which formed the scenes of her residence and various captivities. Whilst drawing freely upon his predecessors, M. Dargaud cordially and effusively acknowledges his obligations to them ; into every line of his History he has carried the feeling of poetry and exalted pity which animates him for the memory of the Royal and Catholic victim ; he merited a very fine letter which Madame Sand addressed to him from Nohant (10 April 1851), a letter of felicitation and very little criticism, in which above all she writes with charm and eloquence of Mary Stuart. If therefore I do not dwell more at length on the work of M. Dargaud to-day, it is because I confess to not belonging to that emotional school which puts so much tenderness and sensibility into history. I do not believe that history need necessarily be tedious and wearisome, but still less do I think that it should be as emotional, as sentimental and magnetic, as it were, as this one is. Without wishing to depreciate M. Dargaud's qualities, which are too much in accordance with the taste of the day not to recommend themselves, I will ask permission to follow by preference a more serious historian, whose judgment and method of proceeding inspire me with every confidence.

Mary Stuart, born on the 8 December 1542, six days before the death of her father, who like all the Kings his predecessors was at strife with his turbulent nobles, began a, an orphan her destiny of inconstant fortunes and

misfortunes. From her very cradle she was attacked by storms :

'Comme si, dès ce temps, la Fortune inhumeuse
Eût voulu m'allaiter de tristesse et de peine.'

as some bygone author makes her say in I know not what tragedy. Crowned at the age of nine months, and already the subject of dispute between the English and French factions, each of which sought her in marriage and tried to gain the upper hand in Scotland, she was soon, through the influence of her mother Mary of Guise, sister of the illustrious Guises, betrothed to the French Dauphin, son of Henry II. On the 13 August 1548 Mary Stuart, then under six years of age, landed at Brest ; affianced to the young Dauphin who was afterwards Francis II, and brought up with the children of Henry II and Catherine de Médicis, she remained in France, as Dauphiness or Queen, until the so premature death of her husband. She lived there in all respects as a French Princess. These twelve or thirteen years of residence in France were her joy and delight, and the beginning of her ruin.

She had become acclimatised to that country in the midst of the most polished, the most scholarly and most gallant Court of the time, shining in her nascent flower as the rarest and most admired of wonders, practising music and all the Arts (*divinae Palladis artes*), learning the languages of antiquity, supporting theses in Latin, commanding an eloquent tongue in French, enjoying the intercourse of her poets, and rivalling them with her own poetry. During all this time Scotland appeared to her in the light of a wild and barbarous country, which she hoped never to see, or at least never to inhabit, again. She flattered herself that she still governed it through her mother, who was Regent. Educated to a policy which was entirely of the Court and quite personal, she had been made to sign, at Fontainebleau at the time of her marriage (1558), a secret deed of gift, by which Scotland was made over to the Kings of France, about the same time that she was making public adherence to the conditions which the Commissioners from Scotland attached to this marriage, and promising to preserve the integrity, the laws and liberties of her native kingdom. It was at this very moment that, in secret, she was

making a gift of the whole kingdom, by an act of *good pleasure* and full power. The Court of France taught her this unwise perfidy when she was only sixteen. Another impolitic piece of unwisdom, which made a great stir when it became known, was when Henry II, at the death of Mary Tudor, made Mary Stuart the Dauphiness quarter the arms of England with those of Scotland, thus setting her up as a declared rival and competitor of Elizabeth.

When Mary Stuart suddenly lost her husband (5 December 1560) and, left a widow at eighteen, it was decided that instead of remaining in her dower of Touraine, she should return to her Scottish kingdom, to put an end to the civil disturbances which had arisen there, there was general mourning in France, in the society of the young lords, noble ladies and poets. The latter recorded in many pieces of verse their regrets, depicting Mary Stuart to the life in this momentous hour, the first really painful moment of her life. In these poems she appears to us refined and graceful, with a complexion of dazzling fairness, with the figure and bust of a queen or goddess, and L'Hôpital himself, in a grave Epithalamium, had said in his own way :

*Adspectu veneranda, putes ut Numen inesse :
Tantus in ore decor, majestas regia tanta est !*

with a long, elegant and slender (*gracilis*) hand, a brow of alabaster shining under her crape, and golden hair which deserves a slight notice. It was a poet (Ronsard) who spoke of the *gold of her tresses and ringlets*, and poets, as we know, are rather vague in their use of words. Madame Sand, speaking of a portrait she saw as a child in the Couvent des Anglaises, says without hesitation : ' Mary was beautiful, but *her hair was red*.' M. Dargaud mentions another portrait where ' a ray of sun-light illumines, he says rather oddly, locks of hair *alive and electric* in the light.' But Walter Scott, reputed the most exact of historical novelists, describing Mary Stuart as a prisoner in the Castle of Lochleven, shows us, as if he had seen them, the thick *dark brown* tresses, which at a certain moment escaped from beneath the Queen's bonnet. Here we are a long way from red, and I see no means of reconciling the different accounts except by resigning ourselves

to that 'so beautiful, so fair and so ash-coloured' hair admired by Brantôme, a very ocular witness; hair which was to whiten in captivity, and which will show this poor Queen of forty-five, at the hour of death and in the hands of the executioner, *quite hoar*, as L'Estoile says. But at nineteen and at the time of her departure from France, the young widow was in the height of her beauty, except for a certain brilliance of complexion, which she lost at the death of her first husband, and which gave place to a greater paleness.

Withal a light, gracious, cheerful spirit, a French raillery, a soul intense, capable of passion and open to desire, a heart which could not go back when inspired by fancy or love, one can understand the charm: such was the adventurous and poetic Queen, who with tears tore herself away from France, sent by politic uncles to recover her authority in the midst of the rudest and most savage of Fronde.

Scotland, since Mary Stuart left it as a child, had suffered great changes: the principal change was the religious Reformation which had taken root there and spread vigorously. The great Reformer Knox preached the new doctrine, which fell upon stern and energetic souls particularly adapted to receive it. The old struggle of Lords and Barons with the Kings was henceforth complicated by, and repeated in, the struggle of the cities and the people against the showy religion of the Court and the Catholic hierarchy. The birth of modern society, of civil equality, of respect for the rights of all, was being laboriously accomplished amid barbarous scenes and with the help of fanaticism. Alone and unadvised, at strife with lords and nobles as her ancestors had been, Mary Stuart, quick and changeable, a slave to her predilections and antipathies, was in herself unequal to the circumstances: how much more so when she found herself face to face with a religious faction, which had come into being and maturity during recent years, a *disputatious and gloomy, moral and audacious* faction, which disputed rationally and with Bible in hand the right of Kings, and backed up logic with prayer? Coming from a literary and artificial Court, she had no means of comprehending these great and secret movements of the people, of staying or turning them to her own advantage by adapting herself

to them : ' She returned, says M. Mignet, full of regrets and dislikes, among the wild mountains and uncultured inhabitants of Scotland. More amiable than able, very ardent and anything but circumspect, she returned with a charm that was out of place, a dangerous beauty, an intelligence keen but variable, a mind generous but impulsive, a taste for Arts, a love of adventures, all the passions of a woman, joined to the extreme liberty of a widow.' Lastly, to complicate the danger of this precarious situation, she had for her neighbour in England a rival Queen, Elizabeth, whom she had offended in the first place by claiming her title, whom she continued to offend no less by a feminine and ostentatious superiority of charm and beauty, a capable, energetic, severe and dissembling Queen, representing the opposite religious opinion and surrounded by able, faithful and consistent counsellors, who were pledged to the same cause. The seven years spent by Mary Stuart in Scotland, from her return from France (19 August 1561) to her imprisonment (18 May 1568), are replete with all the errors and all the faults that could be committed by a young, light-hearted, impulsive, thoughtless princess, whose skill and address are prompted by the senses and passions, and never in view of a general political design. The policy of Mme de Longueville, during the Fronde, appears to me to be of the same stamp.

As to the other faults, the moral faults, of poor Mary Stuart, they are well known, and as proved to-day as any faults of the kind can be. The very indulgent Mme Sand regards as the three capital blots of this Queen, her surrender of Chastellard, her feigned caresses of the ill-fated Darnley, and her neglect of Bothwell.

Chastellard, as we know, was a gentleman of Dauphiné, a musician and poet, and one of the train of servants and lovers of the Queen, who at first received him amiably enough. Chastellard was one of the band who escorted Mary on her departure for Scotland, and, urged by passion, he returned thither some time afterwards ; but he could not restrain himself and be content, as he should have been, with a poetic flame, until he had succeeded in making her share his real passion, if that had been possible. Twice he was found concealed under the Queen's bed, and the second time she lost patience and handed him

over to the justice of the country. The poor Chastellard was beheaded ; he died reciting, they say, a hymn of Ronsard, and exclaiming aloud : '*O cruel Lady !*' After this rigorous action which she allowed to be carried out for fear of scandal, and to place her honour above all reproach and suspicion, Mary Stuart had, it would seem, only one course to take, that is, to remain the most austere and most virtuous of princesses.

But her severity to Chastellard, though calculated to astonish, is only a peccadillo compared with her conduct towards Darnley, her second husband. By marrying this young man, her vassal, but a member of her own clan and bearing the name of Stuart (29 July 1565). Mary escaped the various political combinations into which it was attempted to draw her with a view to a second marriage, and her action might have been a reasonable one, if it had not been in the first place dictated by caprice and passion. But she had become enamoured of Darnley in a day, and her disillusion was equally rapid. This tall, slender youth, by turns timid and vain, with a heart *soft as wax*, had none of those qualities which impress a woman, and subdue her. A woman like Mary Stuart, variable, ardent and impulsive, with the feeling of her weakness and loneliness, likes to find her master, and at times her tyrant, in the man she loves, whilst she speedily despises in him her slave and creature, if he is nothing more ; she prefers an arm of iron to an effeminate hand. Less than six months after her marriage Mary in disgust consoled herself with the Italian David Rizzio, a man of about thirty-two at that time, equally apt in matters of business and of pleasure, who advised her and served her as secretary, and had that musical talent which forms such a convenient cloak and introduction to some other talent with the fair sex. The feeble Darnley having confided his jealousy to the discontented nobles and gentlemen, the latter, in the interests of their policy, urged him to vengeance, and put their swords at his service. The Presbyterian ministers and pastors were involved in the plot, which was laid and prepared with a wonderful unanimity under cover of the divine chastisement, and what is more, by means of acts and formal conventions simulating legality. The Queen and her favourite were caught in the snare, before they appeared

to have any suspicions. David Rizzio was seized by the conspirators while at supper one evening (9 March 1566), in Mary's private chamber, Darnley being present, and from there dragged into an adjoining room and stabbed. Mary was then about six months with child by her husband. From this day, embittered and outraged in her honour and affection, she conceived a still greater contempt, mingled with horror, for Darnley, and swore to be avenged on the violent perpetrators of the murder. To this end she waits and dissembles, she assumes a mask for the first time in her life, and restrains all her impulses. Like all passionate women, she becomes astute only in the interests of her passion and vengeance.

Here we have the most serious and most irreparable passage in her life. Even after forming an adequate idea of the average morality of the sixteenth century, with all the perfidies and atrocities which it tolerated, one is hardly prepared. Mary had in the first place set her heart upon being avenged on the lords who had lent their assistance to Darnley, rather than on that feeble husband himself. To gain her end she becomes reconciled to the latter, and detaches him from his fellow-conspirators. She forces him to disown them, and thus entirely degrades and humiliates him in her own mind. She abides by this conduct as long as no passion for another is joined to this consummate contempt. Meanwhile she is confined (19 June) and makes him father of a son who takes after both in respect of their bad sides, and who was afterwards James I of England, that soul of a casuist in the body of a King. But a new passion has already arisen in Mary's susceptible heart ; the man she chooses this time has neither the weakness of Darnley nor the drawing-room accomplishments of a Rizzio : it is the Earl of Bothwell, aged thirty, ugly but martial in appearance, bold and courageous, violent and ready for any daring. It was to him that this tender and flexible will henceforth clung as to a support. Mary Stuart has found her master, and she will obey him in all things, without scruples, without remorse, as happens in every distracted passion.

How get rid of a husband who is henceforth loathsome ? How unite herself with a man she loves, whose ambition is not of a humour to stop half-way ? Here again, one needs to form a picture of the morals of the time, not

to excuse, but to explain Mary Stuart ; a good number of the very same lords who had taken part in the murder of Rizzio, and who were leagued together by deeds and in writing, offered their services, and to re-enter into her good graces, pointed out the means of getting rid of a husband who had become a troublesome burden. At first she only replied to these overtures by speaking of divorce and the difficulty of obtaining it ; but these unscrupulous men said to her, by the mouth of Lethington, the most able and astute of them all : ' Madame, trouble not your mind in the least ; we are here of the principal of Your Grace's nobility and Council, that shall find the means to make Your Majesty quit of him without prejudice to your son ; and albeit that My Lord Murray, here present (*Mary Stuart's natural brother*), be little less scrupulous for a Protestant than Your Grace is for a Papist, I am sure that he will look through his fingers, and will behold our doings and say nothing to the same.' The word was spoken, it was only a question with Mary as with her brother Murray of *looking through their fingers*, according to the common expression, and to allow things to take their course, without interference. She was obliged however to assist ; she had to entice Darnley, then convalescent after small-pox, into the trap, by pretending a renewal of affection. She lulled his suspicion without much trouble, and resumed her sway over him. She persuaded him to come in a litter from Glasgow to Kirk o' Field, outside the gates of Edinburgh, to a kind of manse, little suited to receive a king and queen, but very convenient for the contemplated crime. Darnley perished there, strangled with his page, in the night of the 9 February 1567. The house was blown up by means of a barrel of gunpowder which had been conveyed into it, in order to suggest an accident. Meanwhile Mary had gone to a masked ball at Holyrood Palace ; she had only left the King her husband in the course of the evening, and after all had been made ready to the smallest detail. Bothwell, who had put in a short appearance at the ball at Holyrood, went out of the town after midnight and directed all the proceedings. These circumstances are now irrefragably proved by the depositions of witnesses, by the confessions of the actors in the drama, and by Mary's own letters, the authenticity of which M. Mignet places

beyond a doubt in a final elucidation. She was well aware that by lending herself so far to the plans of Bothwell, she was furnishing him with weapons against herself, and giving him cause to distrust her in his turn. He might say to himself, as Norfolk did afterwards, that *the pillow of such a woman is an unsafe resting-place.* During the preparations for this horrible ambush she more than once signified to him her repugnance to deceiving that poor credulous invalid, who trusted her : 'I will never rejoice, she said, to deceive anybody that trusts in me, yet, notwithstanding, you may command me in all things. Have no evil opinion of me for that cause, by reason you are the occasion of it yourself, because for my own particular revenge I would not do it to him.' This rôle of Clytemnestra or of Gertrude in *Hamlet* was not, indeed, natural to her, and could only have been forced upon her. But passion on this occasion made her insensible to pity, and made her heart (according to her own confession) as *hard as a diamond*. Mary Stuart soon after this put the crown on her inordinate passion and desire by marrying this same Bothwell, thereby exciting to revolt against her a whole people, whose morality, fanatical as it was, was not at least depraved, and was sounder than that of the gentry.

The crime re-echoed beyond the seas : L'Hôpital, that representative of the human conscience in a terrible century, heard, in the retirement of his country house, of the evil ways of her whose first marriage and early charm he had celebrated ; he perpetuated his indignation in a new Latin poem, in which he recounts the horrors of that fatal night, and is not afraid to call the wife and young mother, the murderer, alas ! of the father of her babe.

On the fifteenth of May, three months, three short months after the murder, at the first smile of spring, was celebrated the wedding with the murderer. Mary Stuart justifies in every way the words of Shakespeare : 'Frailty, thy name is Woman !' And none was more a woman than Mary Stuart.

Here, I cannot admit the third reproach of Mme Sand, to the effect that Mary Stuart forgot Bothwell ; in the calamities and dangers which followed immediately after this last marriage, I can, on the contrary, only see that

Mary had no other thought than that of not being separated from this violent and masterful husband. She loved him so madly, that she said to any who cared to hear (April 1567), 'that she would quit France, England and her own country, and follow him to the ends of the world, clothed in a white *petticoat*, rather than be parted from him.' And soon after, when forced by the nobles to tear herself from Bothwell, with bitter reproaches she asked of them only one thing, 'that they would put them both together into a ship and send them whithersoever fortune might lead.' It was only absence, the final imprisonment, the impossibility of all communication, which forcibly brought about the rupture. It is true that Mary, when a prisoner in England, entreated the Scotch Estates to annul her marriage with Bothwell, in the hope of marrying the Duke of Norfolk, who was enamoured of herself (or pretended to be) and her crown, and whom moreover she never set eyes on. But, Bothwell once ruined and a fugitive, could any one reproach Mary Stuart with a project from which she expected her restoration and deliverance? Her passion for Bothwell had been a madness, and had driven her even to complicity in a crime. This fever having subsided, Mary turned her mind to the resources which offered, and among which were the promise of her hand. Her fault does not lie there, and among so many infidelities and horrors, it would be carrying delicacy very far to expect an eternity of sentiment for these remnants of an unbridled and blood-stained passion. What is due to such passions, when they do not leave hatred after them, and what is most befitting to them, is oblivion.

Such conduct and such deeds, crowned by her incautious flight to England and the unwise surrender of her person into Elizabeth's power, appear very ill-qualified to make of Mary Stuart the touching and pathetic heroine we are accustomed to cherish and admire. And yet she deserves all this pity, and it is enough to follow her through the third and last part of her life, during that long, unjust and painful captivity of nineteen years (18 May 1568—5 February 1587), to make one pity her by degrees and involuntarily. Defencelessly grappling with a crafty and ambitious rival, exposed to all the external consequences of her acts, the victim of

an avaricious and tenacious policy, which does not release its prey but prolongs its tortures without devouring it, she is buoyed up by hopes and does not give in for a single moment. This power of hoping, which has deceived her so many times, becomes in her a *grace of state* and a virtue. She moves the whole world in the interest of her misfortune and stirs it up with a powerful charm. Her cause grows and is transformed. She is no longer the passionate and thoughtless woman, punished for her frailties and inconstancies, she is become the lawful heiress to the English crown, with the eyes of the world upon her as she lies in her dungeon, a faithful, unshaken Catholic, who refuses to sacrifice her faith to the interest of her ambition and even to the saving of her life. The beauty and grandeur of this rôle were calculated to impress the tender and naturally credulous soul of Mary Stuart. She becomes permeated with it, and from the first moment it takes the place of all the old personal feelings, which gradually subside and die in her with the fugitive occasions which had excited them. She appears to remember them no more than the rippling of the waves and the foam of the waters on the shining lakes she had crossed. For nineteen years the whole Catholic world is roused to enthusiasm for her who stands, half-heroine and half-martyr, signalling and waving the banner through her prison bars. Do not accuse her, a captive, of conspiring against Elizabeth; for, with her ideas of divine right and absolute royalty, even though the one sovereign should be the prisoner of the other, to seek the triumph of her cause is not conspiracy, but merely war. From the moment, moreover, when Mary Stuart is a prisoner, when we see her crushed and deprived of all comfort, infirm, alas! and already prematurely grey; when we hear her repeating for the twentieth time, in the longest and most remarkable of her letters to Elizabeth (8 November 1582): 'Your imprisonment, without any right or just ground, has already destroyed my body, of which you will shortly see the end, if it continues there a little longer; and my enemies will not have much time to glut their cruelty on me: nothing is left of me but the soul, which all your power cannot make captive': when we have heard her proud words mingled with complaints, pity for her carries the day, the heart has spoken;

that sweet charm with which she was endowed, and which acted upon all who came near her, regains the upper hand, and influences us at this distance of time. Not with the text of a statute read by a clerk of the Court, not even with the reason of a statesman does one judge her, but with the heart of a knight, or rather, of a man. Humanity, pity, religion, supreme poetic grace, all these invincible and immortal powers feel interested in her personality, and cry for her through the ages. ‘But I pray thee carry this message from me, she said to old Melvil at the moment of her death, that I die a *true woman to my religion, and like a true Queen of Scotland and France.*’ All faiths, all patriotisms, all nationalities, here invoked by Mary Stuart, have long re-echoed her and answered her with tears and love.

How can we, moreover, reproach one who, after nineteen years of punishment and moral torture, in the night preceding her death, sought in the *Lives of the Saints*, which her maids were in the habit of reading to her every night, a great culprit whom God had pardoned? ‘She was arrested by the touching story of the *Good Thief on the Cross*, which appeared to her the most reassuring example of human confidence and divine clemency, and which Jane Kennedy (one of her maids) read to her: ‘He was a great sinner, she said, but not so great as I; I pray Our Lord, in memory of His Passion, to have remembrance and mercy of me, as He had upon him at the hour of his death.’—These true and sincere sentiments, this contrite humility of her last sublime moments, this perfect intelligence and this profound need of pardon, leave us incapable of seeing in her any stain of the past except through tears.

Old Étienne Pasquier was sensible of this. Having to tell, in his *Researches*, of the death of Mary Stuart, he contrasts it with the tragic history of the Constable of Saint-Pol, and that of the Constable of Bourbon, which left him with a mixture of contrary feelings: ‘But in her story of whom I will now discourse, he says, it seems to me that there are only tears, and, peradventure there will be a man who, reading, will not pardon his eyes.’

M. Mignet, who has had to examine all things as an historian, and devotes only short passages to emotion, has very ably set forth and unravelled the various phases

of Mary Stuart's captivity, and the motives which were in play at different times: more particularly has he thrown a new light, with the help of Spanish documents proceeding from the Archives of Simancas, upon the slow preparations for Philip II's enterprise, that unprofitable and tardy crusade which was only decided after the death of Mary Stuart, and which ended in the magnificent wreck of the invincible *Armada*.

On leaving, however, this brilliant and stormy episode in the history of the sixteenth century, which is here described with so much power and judgment, with our minds still filled with these times of violence, treachery and iniquity, and without being so innocent as to believe that humanity has done for ever with such deeds, we begin to congratulate ourselves, all things notwithstanding, and to rejoice that we live in times of an improved and milder public morality; we might exclaim with the Sieur de Tavannes, after recounting in his *Memoirs* the life and death of Mary Stuart: 'Happy is he who lives under a certain State, where good and evil are rewarded and punished according to their deserts! . . .' Happy are the times and societies in which a certain general morality and a human respect for opinion, in which the Penal Code also, but especially the perpetual check of publicity, restrain even the boldest from those criminal resolves that every human heart, if left to itself, is ever tempted to generate!

M. DE BONALD¹

Monday, 18 August 1851.

ALL the world, or at least a good half of the world, is saying every day that society is on the brink of an abyss, that it is on the point of perishing together with property, with the family, with all its fundamental and corner-stone institutions ; that we are face to face with pure barbarism. This cry of alarm, which to-day escapes even from the moderates and the contented of yesterday, naturally carries back our memory to the men who uttered the same cry fifty years ago, who never ceased to utter it to their last breath, and who, in our younger days, appeared in the light of venerable and peevish old men, doleful augurs. Were they, then, in the right against all our bold ideas at the time, against our young hopes ? and shall we in our turn agree with them ? That is not the question I am going to treat ; plenty of others will treat it without me. But I will take advantage of a recent publication, in which a writer with a brilliant and valiant pen, M. Barbey d'Aurevilly, openly takes the side of those he calls *the Prophets of the Past*, and retraces, side by side with the great figure of Joseph de Maistre, the powerful and ingenious figure of Bonald, to say my say about the latter, and to indicate the principal features of his manner.

Of this same Bonald M. de Lamartine, after poetically celebrating him in his youth, has just given us a pleasing and toned-down portrait at the end of the second volume of his *History of the Restoration*. Here, it seems to me, are occasions and aids for any one who wishes to attempt the study of a character. The reader may however set his mind at rest : I shall not add a word to what I think the truth about this superior and respectable thinker.

¹ Article on BONALD, in *Les Prophètes du Passé*, by Barbey d'Aurevilly, 1851.

The Vicomte de Bonald, who died hardly eleven years ago, on the 23 November 1840, after completing his eighty-sixth year, was born on the 2 October 1754 at Milhau, in the Rouergue. He sprang from one of those old provincial families who had served with honour both in the Parliaments and the armies. He received his education in a boarding-school at Paris, then from the Oratorians at Juilly. Of this education he took in only the solid and fruit-bearing parts, without being affected by any free or philosophical elements which might already have mingled with it. He left school to become a musketeer, assisted at the last moments of Louis XV, and one day received, in passing, a charming glance from the new young Queen Marie-Antoinette : these appear to have been the most vivid recollections of this young simple-hearted musketeer, with his noble and innocent face. M. de Bonald's moral nature completely escaped the corruption of the eighteenth century : he escaped not only its corrupting, but also perhaps its softening influence. Having returned to the paternal roof at twenty-two, on the abolition of the body of musketeers (1776), he married and lived the life of his fathers. He was Mayor of Milhau, his native town, from the 6 June 1785 to the 23 July 1790, the date at which he was elected at Rhodez to represent the Department in the Assembly. But he soon gave in his resignation, and thought himself in honour bound to emigrate. All these circumstances of M. de Bonald's life are related with simplicity and with a very strong sense of family religion, in a *Notice* written by one of his sons, M. Henri de Bonald.

M. de Bonald was very nearly forty years of age before he dreamed of writing or becoming an author. The great events of which he was a witness and partly a victim set free in him a strong and rather difficult current of thought, and in face of the redoubled attacks of the storm he felt that he had some truths to express. After the disbanding of the army of the Princes, he settled down to family life at Heidelberg and devoted himself to the education of his two elder sons, whom he had brought with him. In the midst of these quite paternal cares, he composed his first work, which already contains all the others, and which he had printed at Constance by some emigrant priests who had set up a French printing-press

in that town: THÉORIE DU POUVOIR POLITIQUE ET RELIGIEUX DANS LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE, démontrée par le raisonnement et par l'histoire, par M. de B. . . . gentilhomme français, 1796. That was the exact title. M. de Bonald had adopted for his motto this sentence of Rousseau in the *Contrat Social*: 'If the Legislator, mistaking his object, establishes a principle differing from that which is born of the nature of things, the State will never cease to be disturbed until that principle is either destroyed or changed, and invincible Nature has resumed her sway.' —M. de Bonald intended to prove that here *Nature* was no other than the strongest and most closely linked association, religion and the monarchy.

This book of Bonald belonged to that French literature of the Directoire period which arose outside of France, and which signalised itself by some memorable writings and protests raised against the productions within the country: this *external* literature produced on its side, at Neuchâtel in Switzerland, Joseph de Maistre's *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, 1796; at Constance, Bonald's book; at Hamburg, Mallet du Pan's *Correspondance politique* in that same year 1796, and the *Spectateur du Nord*, brilliantly written by Rivarol, the Abbé de Pradt, the Abbé Louis, etc.; in London, Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les Révolutions*, 1797. We see that the thought of restoration, thrust back by the triumph of the philosophical and revolutionary idea, was more or less reacting in its turn and forming a chain around France.

Bonald's book, introduced into France and despatched from Constance to Paris, was in great part seized and destroyed by order of the Government: it had no effect therefore, and was then so to say non-existent.¹ Even if

¹ A most singular fact, revealed to me by the inspection of Sneyd's papers, is that at the time of publishing his work, Bonald sent it to him, accompanied by this mysterious note:

'Quelque masque hideux qui puisse te couvrir,
Sneyd, je doute encore et je veux m'éclaircir !'

'Circulate, but without committing yourself, my work, copies of which will be sent to you on application to the Sieur Montel, printer at Constance in Swabia, or by having it reprinted.'

'Employ every means in your power to spread it, even a formal denunciation in the Convention.'

'Your secret will be in the heart of an honest man, and will not leave it until the time has come.'

And on the back we read, in Sneyd's hand: 'It is M. de Bonald, author

it had been put into circulation and given to publicity, it could not have had any influence by reason of its obscure, difficult and dogmatic form. It belongs to that class of books which is only made to be thought over and quoted by a few.¹

M. de Bonald, who is the first to recognise, in his preface, the defects of his manner, thinks however that his books are calculated to exercise an influence, and that is his purpose in writing. 'From the *Gospel* to the *Contrat Social*, he says, and repeats in many a passage, it is books that have made revolutions.' Revolutions, which have changed for good or evil the state of society, have had no other cause than the manifestation of truths or the propagation of errors. For his part, he thinks that all is error that has been spreading for several centuries, and he wishes to recall the fundamental laws and the truth. This truth is, that there is only one, *a single* constitution (do you understand?) of political society, and only one, *a single* constitution of religious society, the union and agreement of both composing the true civil society. This unique constitution of political society is the purely Royal constitution; this unique constitution of religious society is the Catholic religion: outside of that there is no salvation, even here below, and no stability. On this doctrine, which is fundamental with him and the result of reasoning as well as the principle of faith, he will discourse until his last day, he will state and restate and repeat unceasingly (for if he is the man who varies least, he is also the man who repeats himself most often), and link together all sorts of elevated, powerful or ingenious, often ill-sounding and altogether false, thoughts, thoughts however which are most generally historically true relatively to the past. M. de Bonald is the publicist of the patriarchal family, of patriarchal

of three volumes on the *Theory of Political Power*. . . . who sends me his work through Citizen Barthélémy, ambassador in Switzerland, with this singular note.'

Evidently M. de Bonald hoped by this means to tempt or to touch the honour of his adversary the political metaphysician; but Sleyès did not yield to this seduction or this chivalry of a new kind.

¹ Marie-Joseph Chénier insisted, in his *Tableau de la Littérature*, on the drawbacks of M. de Bonald's method, but he did so without recognising or divining the superior parts of the thought. In this, as in his analysis of Chateaubriand, Chénier proved himself only a *half-critic*.

royalty, of antique and immutable authority, of sacred stability.

One can only understand him rightly by picturing him at his date of 1796, in historic situation so to say, face to face with adversaries of whom he is the most absolute and astonishing contradictor, not by flashes and sallies of verve and genius like de Maistre, but a cold, rigorous, ingenious, cunning and unbending contradictor. Never did the Condorcets in politics, the Saint-Lamberts in morals, the Condillac in philosophic analysis encounter a more pressing and disconcerting joustier ; for observe that, in order to refute them, he does not disdain to adopt a little of their method ; he mixes a little algebra with his reasoning, he has his formulas for coming back to Heaven, he is before everything precise in his use of words, he presses and squeezes them out to make them yield all the spirit and the thought that they conceal. In short he takes from his adversaries a part of their weapons and turns them against themselves, advancing foot by foot.

I will cite only two or three remarkable passages of his *Théorie du Pouvoir*, which can be understood without having recourse to his formula. Developing for the first time that thought which he has since summed up as follows and which constitutes a law : *Literature is the expression of society*, M. de Bonald investigates the connexion between the decline of arts and that of morals : ' It would form in my opinion, he says, a very interesting study in *political literature*, to compare the state of arts among different nations with the nature of their institutions.' And he summarises them in his own manner, pointing out that the greatest perfection in arts and letters, as he conceives them, generally corresponds to the most perfect state of social institutions, that is to say the Monarchy. In a chapter entitled *Of Men and Letters*, he very ingeniously grasps the distinctive qualities of that new species, born or merely developed in the eighteenth century ; he proclaims the disadvantages of such a body vaguely introduced into a State and becoming a power therein ; he attempts to restrict it and to assign limits within which it would be expedient, in his opinion, to confine all literary discussion, whether in respect of religion or of morals. Nothing is more curious than this.

kind of Charter, or rather of Spartan and Hebrew Law, which M. de Bonald meditated imposing upon writers, and that during the greatest Saturnalia of the press, in the height of the Directoire. No less rigorously did he intend to restrict the art of design; he had no pity for statues: 'Governments, he exclaimed, would you increase the power of man? then cramp his heart, thwart his senses. Like a river that loses itself in the sand if not arrested by a dyke, man is only strong in so far as he is restrained.' Thinking himself already back in the times of Lycurgus or Moses, he seriously proposed to the Administration to 'authorise chastened and exemplary editions of the celebrated authors: from each author should be extracted all that is grave, serious, elevated, nobly pathetic, and the rest should be suppressed: 'Everything proceeding from the *social* writer should be preserved, everything proceeding from *man* should be suppressed; and if I could not do the sorting, he says, I should not hesitate to sacrifice the whole.'

Such is the idea that M. de Bonald enunciated in 1796, which he will continue to enunciate and express during the whole of the Restoration, and which he will try to realise as well as he is able in 1827, as President of the Committee of Censure: can we be astonished at the result, judging from the beginning? Whether such a control of Spartan or Roman literature, as it might have been instituted by a Cato the Elder, would be desirable or regrettable, is a question I will not stop to consider, as it is merely the eternal quarrel between the old morals and the genius of arts or thought; but is it possible in the state of society at present or in the near future, or on the new slopes down which the world is hastening? M. de Bonald had no doubt about it. That is his dream.

His prejudice was so great, that he and his followers would hardly sanction any wit properly speaking in their party and in the defence of their cause. One day (the fact is perfectly true), M. de Marcellus went to see M. Michaud during the best days of the *Quotidienne*: 'Well! said M. Michaud to him, you ought to be satisfied, there is wit in your paper.'—'Yes, replied that friend of M. de Bonald and that is precisely what I do not like: there is always something satanic in wit.' It might have been said by M. de Bonald himself.*

By the form and direction of his mind M. de Bonald is in all things a Hebrew, a Roman, a patrician in the antique sense, and an enemy of the Greeks. He never speaks of the Greeks but with contempt and disdain, as a *nation of women and children*, who thought of nothing but pleasure, and who, in their arts, *took from chastity even its modesty*;¹ or as a *nation of athletes* who very quickly became a nation of rhetoricians and sophists, and who in philosophy, 'sought wisdom outside the paths of reason.' He rather grudgingly makes an exception in favour of the Spartans and the Macedonians, stronger and more hardy nations: but he abuses the Athenians, he ignores them, he would suppress them if he could. The fact is that he himself, with his power and his ingenuity, has the ruggedness of his native Rouergue and his mountains; his is the least Athenian of minds. 'He did not love the Greeks, somebody said, and the Greeks paid him back: he lacks Atticism.' He lacks grace, delicacy and charm.

I come straight to the capital and radical defect of M. de Bonald's exalted talent, which, even in the lofty and severe doctrines he professed, he might certainly have avoided. M. de Maistre has wings, M. de Bonald never has any. To come back to the world of ideas and the metaphysical heaven of Malebranche, M. de Bonald makes us pass through the ordeal of words and through Condillac's machinery of language. I tried an experiment which is not very difficult. After some of M. de Bonald's dense and serried pages I read a few pages of Bossuet, in the same order of absolute ideas: *Politics drawn from Scripture*. When we read that fine work of Bossuet's, we at once feel like a traveller who is carried down a broad river with full, majestic and noisy waters in the sunlight. With Bonald, on the contrary, we seem to have embarked at first on a rather unnavigable river; then the master of the vessel takes us into a canal, and puts us on board a carefully closed-in boat, and makes us go below deck where there is neither light nor visible sky, only allowing us at intervals to thrust our heads up the companion, whence we obtain indeed some glimpses of grand scenery, only to lose sight of them again and to

¹ The expression is Montesquieu's, and Bonald adopts it.

return with a sigh to our confinement. That is indeed the effect produced by Bonald's semi-scholastic method, compared with Bossuet's broad and natural progress in the same matters.

Bonald does not care to move, and he is unable to persuade. That bee which, not far from him, visited even the austere de Maistre in his rocky mountains of Savoy, which so long caressed and fed the child Chateaubriand on his native strand, knows him not. Even in enunciating his truths, he employs expressions and manners of speech which are the opposite of insinuating. It is not of him that the poet would ever have said that 'the goddess of Persuasion dwelt on his lips.' To show how unbending and absolute is the truth that is measured by the extent of lights and certainty, he was capable of writing : 'The most enlightened man will be the least indifferent and the least tolerant man ; and the *supremely intelligent Being must be, from the necessity of its nature, supremely intolerant of opinions.*'¹ Here we see God compromised, in the mouth of a pious man, by an unfortunate expression. Thus he said one day, speaking in the Chamber of Peers on the death penalty, that to punish a man with the extreme rigour of the law, *is to send him before his natural judge.* The expression is correct no doubt from the believer's point of view, but it is one of those correct things that are avoided both by the charitable and the astute, those who wish to win and to guide the minds of men, and who know the sensitive spots in their heart. This is, of all ways, the one most opposed to the attractive appeal of Fénelon.

'One does not persuade men to be just, thought M. de Bonald, one forces them. Justice is a combat.' But often, whilst forcing men, it is well to let them think that they are being persuaded.

One of the most frequently quoted chapters of this first work (*La Théorie du Pouvoir*) is that which is headed : *Jesus Christ.* It has power, dignity, a deep, at once

¹ This sentence of M. de Bonald may be read in the tenth volume of his Works in octavo, which is the first volume of the *Mélanges littéraires, politiques et philosophiques* (Paris, 1819), page 258. The italicised words are quoted verbally. The author has since explained his thought, but we are here concerned not so much with the explanation as the first impression, and the sort of pleasure he takes in presenting his idea in a repulsive and offensive form.

historical and religious feeling ; but this chapter appears to me spoiled and interrupted in its simplicity and its gravity by the arguments of a theoretician and a party man. Considering the person of the Man-God in all its states and conditions, M. de Bonald says : ' In the family he is the son, he is the kinsman, he is the friend ; in political society, he is *subject* and even he is *power* ; in religious society, he is *power* and even he is *subject*.' This antithesis of *power* and *subject* is bound up with the author's fundamental formula ; but how comes it that he does not forget it here ? how can he think of pursuing his didactic demonstration in such an example ? Thus again, more than thirty years later, in his last work (for, with M. de Bonald, the last work resembles the first), in his *Démonstration philosophique du Principe constitutif de la Société*, he deduces from a philosophical and almost grammatical construction the necessity of the Man-God. M. de Bonald is not conscious that that sort of thing shocks and cools the reader. A man of faith, he lacks that effusion which arouses and carries away. When speaking of Jesus Christ he has none of that naïveté and that tenderness which Pascal had and noted as the distinctive marks of the Christian spirit ; he has none of the reasons of the heart, those which reasoning does not know.

What I say here of M. de Bonald's first work may be said of all the works he published since. Returning to France under the Directoire, he was one of those who, under the Consulate, laboured at rebuilding the moral ruins of society, and he published in 1802 his Treatise *Du Divorce* and his *Législation primitive*.

His Treatise *Du Divorce* was a noble and good action, the fruits of which still subsist. As a family man M. de Bonald, in occupying himself with such a theme, was on the very bed-rock of his conviction. He felt more than anybody the political and public bearing of a question in which some saw only a regulation of private life and a domestic facility. He had long said to himself : ' It is by the social condition of women that the nature of the political institutions of a society can always be determined.' We can only regret that, here as elsewhere, he should have complicated the excellent reasons of every kind that he brought forward, with others that are too

absolute, too abstruse and too particular. One would think at times that he is obscuring his own lights at pleasure. To prove the religion of the first families and the priestly nature of the first patriarchs, what need had he to bring in equations and proportions, so to speak, involving his favourite terms, *cause, means, effect*, which here correspond to *father, mother, child*, and all that follows? But, beside these quite disagreeable fancies of the dialectician, we are glad to be able to extract some fine and just thoughts like this one, that *the law must not conspire with a man's passions against his reason*: 'Thus, on the side to which man leans, the law sets him straight again, and it should to-day forbid dissolute men to be dissolute, as, a few centuries ago, it forbade ferocious and vindictive men to exercise private vengeance.' The conclusion of this Treatise *Du Divorce*, which is formally addressed to the legislators of the Code Civil, possesses a grave and real eloquence; the soul of the good man and the good citizen is vented in unmistakable accents; we hear in it that virtuous cry and that vow of amendment which is raised by society after every great disorder, and which only asks to be regularly guided: 'Command us to be good, and we will be good. Make Europe forget our disorders by dint of wisdom, as you have blotted out our shame by dint of successes. You have made France the great nation by her exploits, make her the good nation by her morals and her laws. We have had enough of glory, too many pleasures; it is time to give us virtues.'

The *Législation primitive* which appeared abreast with the *Génie du Christianisme*, and in the same direction as a reparative, was of quite a different character: 'The truth in works of reasoning, said M. de Bonald, is a king at the head of his army on the day of battle: in M. de Chateaubriand's work it is like a queen on the day of her coronation, in the midst of the pomp of fêtes, the brilliancy of her Court, the acclamations of the people, decorations and perfumes.' In the *Législation primitive*, the body of the book, which merely consists of a series of often very contestable propositions and axioms, arranged and numbered like the stones of an unbuilt edifice, or like a table of contents, appeared and will always appear difficult and thankless reading. Other subsequent parts

were added to it, which are only connected by way of digression ; I know no work that is more closely reasoned and more badly composed.¹ But what is readable is the *Discours préliminaire*, in which we find the whole Bonald with his system.

This system, which I can only briefly indicate, is as follows : M. de Bonald, a man of faith, of deep and orthodox religion, which was never shaken, firmly believed in the letter of the Sacred Books and the creation of man as recorded in the story of Moses. He believed, then, that God created man in *His own image*, and M. de Bonald has a manner of pressing out the meaning of words which leads him to draw long and precise consequences. From this resemblance and this *similitude* of man to God, he infers that there is an association, literally, between God and man, and that the latter has received from God the law, thought and speech, *without which human thought is not*. And what God did for the first man, man in his turn will do for those who are born of him : he will teach them *speech*, and through it truth, that common stock and patrimony of the family, and of society which is merely the union of families. Man is therefore only instructed and elevated from outside, through society : it is important therefore that that first stock of social truth should not be corrupted, or, if it has been corrupted, that it should be reintegrated and restored to its primitive purity, as it was, and even in a higher degree of perfection, at the coming of Jesus Christ. Since that time the corruptions could only be transitory. That is Bonald's hope, and, in spite of appearances to the contrary which are calculated to disturb the weak, that is his faith. For it would appear absurd and sacrilegious to him to think that God left to men only a single medium of knowledge and truth, and that this medium is for ever turned aside or intercepted. He believes therefore in the definite triumph of the Catholic Christian religion over all religions, and of the purely

¹ I like to make a note of true words, which are not ordinarily written down. In his conversation M. de Bonald sometimes said witty things, even about himself. When somebody spoke to him of the different degrees of success obtained by the *Législation primitive* and the *Génie du Christianisme*, which appeared at the same time, he said : 'It is quite natural : I administered my drug in a natural state, and he gave it with sugar.'

Monarchical constitution over all governments, just as he believes in a geometrical truth, just as he *believes in the equality of the diameters of one and the same circle* : that is the comparison he employs somewhere.

Thus, in society, M. de Bonald believes in a particular order, as natural and as necessary as the general order of the universe : so he marches along his road, tranquilly, firmly, under the eye of God and those he has set over us, as in the time of Moses and the Decalogue, as in the time of Gregory VII and Innocent III, as in the time of Saint Louis. What matters to him the eighteenth century and the coming of Voltaire ? Voltaire is in his eyes only *the greatest of beaux-esprits*. Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois* appears to him to have been written very often with the same levity which dictated the *Lettres persanes*. When M. de Bonald speaks of Bossuet, he almost feels himself to be his contemporary, he habitually calls him *M. Bossuet* : ' But Saint Augustine, Saint Leo, M. Bossuet, even the Gospel, he says, have over Christians only the authority that the Church gives them.' By condescension however, and in order to show that the truth accepts all weapons, M. de Bonald takes at the hands of the eighteenth century the different problems, as that century puts them. As in a methodic siege, he drives and repulses the enemy along the very trenches that they have made, and thus he returns by a narrow way to an elevated philosophy.

This mingling of restricted means, of narrow beliefs and lofty views, is perpetual with him. His reasoning is close and dense, and so subtile, that when once we are within it we can hardly see the light, nor that Heaven which it is precisely his purpose to show us.¹ The surest and most convenient way of judging the fine parts of Bonald, is to break, to shake as it were his net, and to see only the thoughts that drop out of it. Then will appear a number of golden definitions and maxims : for example, that definition of man, which others had found before him, but which he reinvented and again brought to honour : ' Man is an intelligence served by organs.' Here are a few more of these fine thoughts, which savour of a modern Pythagoras :

¹ ¹ Joubert, in his *Pensées*, employs a quite similar image in judging Bonald.

'In morality, every modern doctrine which is not as old as man, is an error.'

'The aim of moral philosophy is not so much to teach men what they are ignorant of, as to make them admit what they know, and above all to make them practise it.'

'It is not knowledge that we lack so much, as the courage to make use of it.'

'The Revolution began with the declaration of the Rights of Man, it will end with the declaration of the Rights of God.'

M. de Bonald is among the writers who could yield the largest number of these great or ingenious thoughts ; one might compile a little book to be entitled *Esprit* or even *Génie de M. de Bonald*, and it would be a very substantial and very original book. He himself published in 1817 a volume of *Thoughts*, into which however, in common with all writers of maxims, he admitted too large a number. I will only call attention to a few which appear to me among the most just, the most moderate, and quite uncontested :

'In the government of society, good sense should fill up the long interregna of genius.'

'Irreligion sits badly upon women ; it has too much pride for their weakness.'

'Put no faith in novels : to be a mother one must be a wife.'

'A man of wit wants a woman of sense : two wits in a house are too many.'

In these latter thoughts we can see the family man, the husband with the heart of an ancient, the simple man who recovered his bonhomie and his amenity in his domestic circle. And this again :

'Elevated feelings, strong affections, simple tastes, make a man.'

As a public man, he had some ideas on the rôle of France and her magisterial office in Europe which have often been repeated by others and exaggerated since ; but he did not exaggerate when he said forcibly :

'A dangerous work written in French is a declaration of war against all Europe.'

On the corruption of taste and the relations between talent and morals, he gives some sober and sound counsels, which recall Vauvenargues :

'The beautiful in everything is always severe.'

'Licentious conduct sharpens the wit and falsifies the judgment.'

'The author of a serious book has completely failed if he is praised only for his wit.'

"*Great thoughts come from the heart,*" Vauvenargues said. This maxim is incomplete, and he should have added : "*Great and lawful affections come from the reason.*"

M. de Bonald had, in his writings, in spite of their grave and laboured form, a delicate and often piquant irony ; this comes out best in his *Pensées* :

'*Follies, he says, committed by clever people ; extravagant things said by men of wit ; crimes committed by honest men,—those are revolutions.*'

That is smart, that is just, and not too hard.
He asked himself again, and this is the time for all of us to ask ourselves with him :

'What has occurred then in society, that we are no longer able to set going, except by the strength of our arms, an unwound machine that formerly went by itself, without noise and without effort ?'¹

Under the Restoration, M. de Bonald did no more than apply to public things, and to the political discussions in which he was involved, his invariable doctrine of all times. Logical, consistent and sincere, he applied it in the greatest as in the smallest things. Just as in the Chamber of Deputies and afterwards in the Chamber of Peers he favoured all the *retrograding* proposals and measures, as a member of the General Council of his Department, he opposed to the best of his power the construction of a high road, which might have been useful even to him for his estate, convinced that 'to bring men together, as he puts it, is not the surest means of uniting them.' Totally opposed to the tendency of modern society, to anything that centralises and mobilises, he included in one and the same anathema the great capitals, the telegraph, credit and all its facilities ; he would have liked to return to the iron coinage of Sparta. No one knew better than he all the things he did not want. His principle was that it is well in any case to resist innovation, though it were truth : that made him quarantine it. Such as he was, he gained a double reputation during these fifteen years, the reputation of an oracle and a man

¹ *Without noise and without effort*, you are pleased to say so : when we go back in history, we find nothing but *noise* and *effort* in every century ; however it is no less true that in the old society there were, in the midst of all its disorders, one or two great springs which continued to go or which quickly resumed their advantages, and which have broken since.

of genius in his party, among the small number of stubborn and immutable minds, and even, to a certain extent, among all ranks of intelligent royalists : with the others, the liberals, he passed for an intelligent, headstrong, perhaps rather cruel country squire, and he enjoyed the most magnificent unpopularity. All that must be toned down and tempered to-day.

In ordinary intercourse, 'he was mild and indulgent, says M. de Lamartine, like those men who think themselves in certain and infallible possession of their truth.' His letters to Joseph de Maistre, recently published, show him to be simple indeed, following out in all points his ideas and practising them, devoting much attention to details, and often returning in a natural yet marked manner to his family cares and domestic interests. In private he had bonhomie and shrewdness, but without any brilliancy or greatness.

As a publicist, in spite of his great parts, I cannot find in him any true signs of genius, which are a natural perceptive faculty, a capacity for renewing one's opinions, prescience and the discovery of new truths : he did no more than restate and reconstruct, in an original, ideal and sometimes fantastical form, the doctrines of the past, without admitting or conceiving any of the compromises and transformations by which they might be linked to the future. As a philosopher (if I may dare to have an opinion), he appears to me much greater than he is as a politician. In his two volumes of *Recherches sur les premiers Objets des Connaissances morales*, he defended the spiritualistic philosophy with the sharpest and most cunning weapons it has ever wielded in our days. The physiologists of the School of Lucretius and La Marck who are able and bold enough to reply to him (for there is a mortal quarrel between them and him) are yet to be born.¹

¹ The philosophic question for Bonald bears entirely on origins, on the origin of ideas which he brings back to that of speech, and consequently on the origin of speaking creatures. Bonald is the chief of the partisans of *Creation* against those who maintain a purely natural human origin. Distinguished eclectics, like M. Damiron, who interfered in the discussion, stand betwixt and between and do not clearly explain themselves. Are you in favour of the Creation of man by God taken literally, or in favour of generation after the manner of the pure naturalists ? there is no alternative. There lies the heart of the question for Bonald. If you are for Moses' story, you are a Jew, a Christian, a Catholic ;

His relations with de Maistre and Chateaubriand help to define him : a writer, in my opinion, is not well defined until his kindred and his opposites have been named and distinguished beside him. With regard to Joseph de Maistre, Bonald, within a year of the same age, is neither a disciple nor a precursor : 'I have been neither his disciple nor his master, he says somewhere. We have never met ; but I regard him as one of our finest men of genius, and feel honoured by the friendship he accorded me, and by the conformity of our opinions. He wrote to me, shortly before his death : *I have thought nothing that you have not written ; I have written nothing that you have not thought.*' This assertion, so flattering to me, suffers however a few exceptions on both hands.' It suffers exceptions especially in respect of form of talent and nature. When saying the same things as Bonald, Joseph de Maistre is bold, impetuous, varied ; he seems almost a liberal genius from the verve and colour of his expression ; he indulges in thrusts and outbursts which baffle system ; whilst the other, vigorous, subtle, deep, strict and unbending, is invariably confined within systems.¹

With regard to Chateaubriand, he was fourteen or fifteen years younger than Bonald, that is to say of another generation. United in 1802, companions in arms in the same combat, in the same cause of the literary and religious Renascence, Chateaubriand greeted the *Législation primitive* on its first appearance in two articles of an elevated criticism published in the *Mercure* ; and we have seen how Bonald, at this period, compared the truth glorified by Chateaubriand to a queen. By degrees however the antipathies of their minds and natures declared themselves ; and politics made them break out after 1815. They appeared more united than ever in their defence of the same principles, in the *Conservateur*, but

Bonald will not let you go till he has extracted from the first fact all these consequences. The Deist does not exist for him : 'A Deist, he says, is a man who, in his brief existence, has not had time to become an Atheist.'—(See an essay entitled *De l'Origine du Langage*, by M. Ernest Renan, in the Review *La Liberté de Penser*, 1848.)

¹ De Maistre, like Fénelon, had read Catullus, and one day quoted a few lines of him in a letter to Bonald ; the latter appears a little astonished : ' You have made Catullus tell me the prettiest things, he replied, and if I had not seen the name below, having almost forgotten that grave author, I should have thought the lines were yours, they are so easy and agreeable.'

they differed in their views and ulterior designs. Bonald remained what he had been from the beginning, the man of the tower and the antique and Gothic steeple, whilst Chateaubriand, left to his brilliant instincts, already became the man of the torrent : ' He is the great champion of the Constitutional System, wrote Bonald to Joseph de Maistre in 1821 ; he is going to preach it in Prussia, and he will say nothing good about me, whom he regards as an out-of-date person who dreams of the things of a past age. . . . He is a very great colourist, and above all very skilful in looking after his successes.' Soon, and after Chateaubriand's entering the Ministry, in the struggles of 1826-1827, the discussions on the liberty of the press brought on an open rupture between him and Bonald, in which the old athlete dealt the brilliant deserter some direct, cutting blows, which might have appeared to cause deep wounds if they had attracted any attention : but at that time the noise and triumph of opinion covered everything.

The future will, I believe, reserve a sufficiently high place for M. de Bonald : as the ages recede and institutions vanish, one feels the need of summing up their spirit at a distance in a few figures and a few names. The name and person of M. de Bonald form one of the justest and most faithful representations that we can find of the monarchical and religious order considered in the most absolute sense ; he was one of the last in the breach and never yielded an inch of ground in theory. In spite of the distinguished adhesion of M. Barbey d'Aurevilly, I do not think that M. de Bonald is on the eve of finding many disciples ; but his adversaries, those who will advance furthest by their systems towards the still ill-defined forms of the new society, will regard it as an honour to themselves to respect him, and to salute in him a champion at least who to the last had the intrepidity of his belief and who never showed any weakness.

AMYOT¹

Monday, 25 August 1851.

THE subject prescribed for the so-called Prize of Eloquence to be awarded in 1849 by the French Academy was the *Eulogy of Amyot*; M. Amédée Pommier gained the prize, M. de Blignières the *proxime accessit*. Since then M. de Blignières has revised and completed his work. Regarding his *Eulogy of Amyot*, distinguished by the Academy, merely as a Preliminary Discourse, he has written a book, full of research and dissertations, on the different works of Amyot, his language and his life; he discusses all the points which have lent themselves to controversy and criticism; he strives with zeal, learning and curiosity, to throw light upon them to the advantage of his author. This book does much credit to M. de Blignières, who is Professor of Rhetoric in one of our Paris Colleges (*Collège Stanislas*); the knowledge he displays is not the only pleasing feature in the book; his affection for Amyot reveals his character, a mind that loves Letters, and which loves them with that humanity of former days, with that communicative warmth which is calculated to win the youth of the day, and which was the possession of the old masters. The young professor of Rhetoric has evidently the qualities of amiability and diffuseness, some of the qualities possessed by Amyot, which are found again in Rollin, and which lend a charm even to serious instruction. The only fault I have to find with him is that he is a little too complacently expansive, and occasionally a little lengthy: in that respect again he seems to have tried to take after Amyot.²

¹ *Essay on Amyot*, by A. de Blignières. 1 vol. (1851.)

² The author of the work in question, M. Auguste de Blignières, died two months after this *Causerie* was published, on the 1 October 1851, at Lyons, in his twenty-seventh year.

It is to the latter that I shall give my attention to-day. Amyot is one of the most celebrated names in our old literature ; we say *the good Amyot*, without quite knowing why, just as we say *the good Henry IV*, *the good La Fontaine*. No literary name of his century (if we except Montaigne) enjoys so universal a favour. When discussing a pretty and graceful simplicity of language, we define it at once by saying : That is the language of Amyot. This simple translator of Plutarch has acquired the most enviable personal glory ; he is treated as a natural and original genius. Through his translations we seem to read his physiognomy, and to love him as if he had given us his own thoughts.

A modern Italian poet, Leopardi, envying the glory of those opportune and happy Italian translators, who have inseparably associated themselves with some illustrious ancient Classic, exclaims : ' Who does not know that Caro will live as long as Virgil, Monti as long as Homer, Bellotti as long as Sophocles ? *O what a beautiful destiny to be unable to die, except with an immortal !*' Such is the lot and the good fortune of Amyot. He helped to make Plutarch popular, and Plutarch has repaid him by making him immortal.

This is justice, if we regard it rightly. And yet all favour, when prolonged into posterity, meets with its trials and reverses, and Amyot's reputation has not been without its flows and ebbs. We have asked ourselves whether, in a century as rich as the sixteenth, in a century which possessed so great a number of writers, vigorous, coloured, animated, simple, or even occasionally graceful, it was just to assign all the honour of simplicity, grace and eloquence to a mere translator. Examining his translations in themselves, exact scholars and critics have observed mistakes, inaccuracies and oversights of various kinds. But admitting all this, after examining and discussing his work as a whole, Amyot keeps his place, and will keep it ; and he deserves it. He deserves it, says Montaigne, an excellent judge, for *his simplicity and purity of language, in which he surpasses all others, for his persistence in so long a labour, for the depth of his knowledge, having succeeded in interpreting an author so hard and thorny as Plutarch (for it is not necessary to know Greek in order to feel that one is borne away with*

Amyot, in a current of continuous sense, and that, saving such and such points of detail, he is master of his subject and hits the spirit of the whole). ‘But, adds Montaigne, what I am most pleased with him for is the discreet choice he has made of so noble and useful a book, to make a present of to his country. We ignorant people had been undone, had not this book raised us out of the mire.’ And he continues, with a grateful sense of this benefit: ‘By its favour, we now dare both speak and write; by it the ladies are able to school their school-master: *‘tis our breviary.*’ Nothing can avail against such a testimony. It is right that the reward of a writer should be measured by the extent of the influence he exercises, when that influence is wholly good and salutary. Amyot has rendered services: Firstly, an inestimable service to the language, by spreading and popularising it in its best expressions, in its amplest and easiest economy, in its broadest and sincerest diction, by the aid of the interest which became attached to the *Lives* of Plutarch; secondly, he has rendered no less a service to reason and the public good sense by circulating Plutarch, and his treasures of ancient virtue and morality, among all kinds of people, with the aid of a language so clear, so facile, so diffuse, so flowing and so pleasing. There was great good luck in such a choice: how can we wonder that to justice was added favour, and some enthusiasm to gratitude?

Jacques Amyot, the best and most complete *Life* of whom was written by the Abbé Lebeuf, was born at Melun on the 30 October 1513, of poor parents, who however afforded him the means of studying. He came to Paris very young, to continue as best he might his studies in grammar; at the same time he acted in a menial capacity to several of his fellow scholars. His mother, Marguerite des Amours (a suitable name for Amyot’s mother) was careful to send him a loaf of bread every week by the bargemen proceeding from Melun to Paris. We are told that in the evenings, for want of the wherewithal to buy a candle, he used to read by the glimmer of burning charcoal; the same thing is related of the young Drouot, reading as a child by the light of his father’s baking oven. There is a certain charm about these first beginnings of Amyot, which form the legend so to speak of this heroic

age of learning. At the period when he studied, knowledge was dearly bought : the new methods applied by Budé, and favoured by Francis I, were hardly yet introduced into the schools. Not everybody could learn Greek, even if he desired. Amyot, diligent, patient, rather slow, so they say, had to conquer his learning by dint of obstinacy and ardour. Master of Arts at nineteen, he then went to Bourges to study Law ; he there became a tutor and soon after Professor of Greek and Latin languages in the University of that town. The ten or twelve years spent at Bourges were fruitful years, in which he laid the foundations of all his great labours. He translated the romance of *Theagenes and Charicles*, but he was already meditating his *Plutarch* : and in general, all that he did in the interval, his pretty translation of *Daphnis and Chloe*, his creditable translation of *Diodorus Siculus*, were only by way of being a prelude or a pass-time ; he reserved all his powers for his great work.

Francis I was informed of Amyot's first works and his plans : he saw the translation of *Theagenes and Charicles*, which was printed in the year of his death (1547) ; he was acquainted with several of the *Lives* of Plutarch, which Amyot presented to him as an essay : he commanded him to continue in so noble an undertaking, and, by way of encouragement, made him Abbot of Bellozane : this was the last living presented by this King and friend of Letters, for he died shortly after.

Amyot, assured of his subsistence, and believing that, Francis I being no more, fortune was deserting him in France, turned his eyes to Italy, that true home of the Renaissance, whither he was drawn by so many precious manuscripts to be consulted. He seized an opportunity offered him by M. de Morvilliers, of Bourges, who had been appointed ambassador to Venice, and followed him beyond the mountains. These four or five years spent in Italy, at Venice and Rome, were highly profitable to Amyot, both for the study of texts and for his intercourse with his fellow-men, as well as for his knowledge of affairs. On one occasion (in September 1551) he became quite an important personage, having been sent by his ambassador to the Council of Trent, to convey the King's letters of protest : but we must not exaggerate the part he played, which was only a very secondary one.

on this occasion, as in all the public occasions with which he was concerned. Amyot was in no degree a Statesman, he was a man of study, full of diligence, curiosity, patience, and admirable for the expansive, pleasing and ingenuous fashion in which he presented the fruits of his labours. The Cardinal de Tournon, meeting him in Rome and appreciating him on account of his studious and moral qualities, spoke of him at Court, at a time when Henry II was seeking a tutor for his two sons, the Dukes of Orleans and Anjou (afterwards Charles IX and Henry III), and Amyot was chosen (1554). In order to justify the honour of such a choice, Amyot became doubly zealous over his great work in his hours of leisure, and he published in 1559 his complete translation of the *Lives* of Plutarch, dedicating it to Henry II.

It is amusing to observe that, in this same year 1559, he published, without, it is true, attaching his name to it, *les Amours pastorales de Daphnis et de Chloé*, that free and entertaining romance which becomes still more delightful in the translation, since Amyot imparts to it a naïveté of diction which is sometimes wanting in the Greek text, and which here only adds to its propriety. Nothing could give a better idea of the moral tone of an epoch and a Court than the publication by a dignitary of the Church, and the duly appointed tutor to the King's sons, of so licentious a work, and the fact that it was accepted quite as a matter of course. Imagine, if you can, the tutor of a Royal prince, from Bossuet down to the worthy and learned preceptor of the Count of Paris, taking it into his head to relieve the labours of his grave office by a publication of this kind. We must add, however, as a partial explanation of this phenomenon, that in the sixteenth century the cult of Antiquity was such, that it purified by its mere touch all that issued from it.

The following years were for Amyot years of prosperity and honour. On the best footing with the Court, seeing his beloved pupil, little Charles IX, ascend the throne at eleven years of age, and never ceasing to regard him as the gentlest and most amiable of princes (*natura mitissimus erat*); equally honoured and esteemed by his other pupil Henry III, Grand Almoner of France under both kings, soon to become Bishop of Auxerre,

Amyot realised the finest dreams of a savant and man of letters of the sixteenth century. He continued to justify the favours of fortune by publishing, in 1572, the Moral Works of Plutarch, which he dedicated to his pupil and master, King Charles IX, in recognition of benefits received, 'and also, he says, to testify to posterity and those who have not the good fortune to know you intimately, that Our Lord has endowed you with a singularly kind nature . . .' This was written in the very year of the Night of St. Bartholomew. Without taking literally the imprecations of d'Aubigné on the King who had the misfortune to have his name associated with this fatal night, it will be admitted that Amyot harboured at least some of the illusions of a tutor and nursing father.—As to the little King, he criticised his good master whilst loading him with honours ; it is related that he sometimes rallied him on his avarice and parsimony, and in fine, a judge of poetry himself, who wrote some tolerably good verses, he took the liberty of considering those that Amyot inserted in his translations, *harsh*. Amyot, very little of a poet in that respect, did not think him any the less amiable.

Thus loaded with the honours and privileges of his profession, it does not appear that Amyot was at all ambitious in politics ; he was not one of those preceptors who, like the Cardinal de Fleury, try to insinuate themselves into great affairs, and to dominate for always the minds of those they have fashioned. Amyot had no such high aims nor such a firm belief in himself. In his Dedication of the *Lives* of Plutarch to Henry II, he speaks humbly of himself, more humbly than we could have wished : 'Not that I am of opinion,' he says, 'that there could proceed from me, *a person so humble and insignificant in every quality*, anything that deserved to be placed before Your Majesty's eyes.' At the Council of Trent, in September 1551, it having devolved upon him to present the King's letters of protest to the Fathers of the Council, and finding that assembly little disposed to receive them, he writes to his ambassador : 'I sang as small as I possibly could, feeling that I was so badly received, and sufficiently so to be put in prison, if I had been a little more forward in speech.' Truly, a mere secretary, but one who had the stuff of a Mazarin or a

d'Ossat, or even a Fleury, would have expressed himself differently and cut a better figure. Whenever he is not sustained by the soul of an Ancient in his style and his thoughts, Amyot stoops rather too much, humbles himself and crawls : he is nothing more than a great man of letters and an excellent translator. As a Bishop he fulfilled his duties with zeal, regularity, and precision. Transported suddenly from the pagan graces of Longus or the natural beauties of Plutarch to the study of Theology and the *Somme théologique* of St. Thomas, he applies his mind to them, and even succeeds ; he endeavours to take a pleasure in them, and to persuade himself that they are not tiresome. He strives to address his flock at Auxerre in a clear, pure and lucid language ; and we can indeed form some idea of the suave, diffusive and moral character of these homilies, delivered in a rather feeble voice by the good Bishop of Auxerre. He is described to us in the peaceful years of his episcopate, fond of music, readily joining in part-singing with his canons and precentors before meals in his own house. 'He even took a delight in playing instruments, and often before dinner he would touch the keys of a harpsichord, in order to sit down to table with a mind more free, after his serious studies.' The good Bishop's taste for music went so far as to lead to abuses, and he introduced into his cathedral novelties in church-singing which scandalised the partisans of classicism, the zealous lovers of the old Gregorian plain-song. However, it was in his household that one of his canons, who was at the same time his steward and shared his table, invented the *serpent*, a choir instrument of very convenient use. That is some reparation for his faults, in the eyes of the pure and austere partisans of a solemn tone in chanting psalms. Kind, easy-going, a lover of music, rather timid in public, a little lost in details, hasty tempered, but soon recovering, frank, open and simple-minded, thus he is described and thus we may indeed easily imagine the good Amyot, who was suddenly visited by misfortune towards the end of his happy existence. The assassination of the two Guises during the sitting of the States-General at Blois, gave the signal to the malcontents and the Leaguers at Auxerre : the Superior of a Cordelier monastery, Claude Trahy, an-

nounced and preached everywhere that Bishop Amyot had known and approved all, and that in absolving the King whose Almoner he was, he had made himself his accomplice. I need not enlarge on these scenes of the League, which in the course of a few months made the rich and flourishing Amyot 'the most afflicted, ruined and undone poor priest, as I believe, in France,' he says (9 August 1589).—Poor Amyot! his last years were sad and bitter. At law with his Chapter, threatened and insulted, with pistol in hand, by that odious leaguing Friar, Master Trahy, and by his parishioners, between the crimes of Blois on one side and the outrages of Auxerre on the other, he might well draw a contrast between the great men of Plutarch and the miseries and fanaticism of his own time. He did not go so far as to side with Henry IV, and it was his misfortune rather than his error that he did not foresee him, and hope in him. He died on the 16 February 1593, in his eightieth year, without having an idea that things had taken a turn for the better, and that salvation had come to his country. Plutarch at least, in his city of Chæronea, clothed with the honourable offices of magistrate and priest of Apollo, was able to grow old peacefully and serenely, in the study of Philosophy and the Muses, and, almost a nonagenarian, they say, witness the dawn of the reign of Antoninus Pius.

It is difficult to attempt a criticism of the works of Amyot, and to judge them rightly, without having both the original texts and the translations before one's eyes: but no,—let us take the latter, as has almost always been done, as original works, written in a flowing, graphic, diffusive, simple and familiar style, which may be read as if they flowed from a single and unique vein. At every step, felicitous and ingenious expressions, what we might call imagination in style, appear without any effort, just as if the author were at home in his subject, and were excited, as he proceeds, with his own thought. These are the merits of this incomparable translator, who appeared at a decisive moment, when he was able to take liberties which, after his time, would not have been overlooked to the same extent. I will begin by quoting first a celebrated passage, which unites, in a perceptible example, the flower of his most habitual and customary

qualities. It refers to Numa and his first legislative and civilising acts, which softened the fierce nature of the early Romans; I reluctantly alter the old spelling in my quotation, since the very length of the words, and the superabundance of needless letters, help to render to the eyes the slowness and the suavity of the effect:

'Now Numa having done these things at his first entry into his kingdom, still to win further favour and good will of the people: began immediately to frame his citizens to a certain civility, being as iron wrought to softness, and brought them from their violent and warlike desires, to temperate and civil manners. For out of doubt, Rome was properly that which Plato calleth a seething city. For, first it was founded by the most courageous and warlike men of the world, which from all parts were gathered there together, in a most desperate boldness: and afterwards it increased, and grew strong, by arms and continual wars, like as piles driven into the ground, which the more they are rammed in, the further they enter, and stick the faster. Wherefore Numa judging it no small nor light enterprise, to pluck down the haughty stomachs of so high-handed, so fierce and violent a people, and to frame them into a sober and quiet life: did seem to work it by means of the Gods, with drawing them on thereto by little and little, and cooling of their hot and fierce courages to fight, with sacrifices, feasts, dances, and common processions, which he celebrated ever himself. . . .'

And in a later passage, showing how, during the reign of Numa, the temple of Janus, which was only opened in time of war, was never open a single day, but remained continually closed for forty-three whole years:

'So utterly dead and forgotten were then all occasions of wars: because not only at Rome the people were through the example of justice, clemency, and the goodness of the king brought to be quiet, and to love peace: but also in the cities thereabouts, there began a marvellous change of manners and alteration of life, as if some gentle air had breathed on them, by some gracious and healthful wind, blown from Rome to refresh them. And quite gently flowed into men's hearts a desire to live in peace, to till the ground, to bring up their children in repose and tranquillity, and to serve and honour the Gods: that almost through all Italy, there was nothing but feasts, plays, sacrifices, and banquets. The people did traffick and frequent together, without fear or danger, and visited one another, in all cordial hospitality: as if out of the springing fountain of Numa's wisdom many pretty brooks and streams of good and honest life had run over all Italy, and had watered it: and that the mildness of his wisdom had from hand to hand been dispersed through the whole world. . . .'

I reluctantly curtail this flowing and endless sentence of Amyot's, which is not yet ended: but we have felt the penetrating charm, and that genius for expression which, without a struggle, without an effort, is animated

and inspired by his model. Here we have already in the sixteenth century the language of the *Télémaque* or that of *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, or again that of *Massillon*, with the addition of its own native freshness. Observe, as we go along, how graphic the expressions, how speaking and altogether faithful, or better than if they were literally faithful, for they are felicitously invented, *a seething city*, (*une ville bouillante*), *cool their fierce courage* (*attiédir cette fierid de courage*), *a high-handed people* (*un peuple si haut à la main*), gently flow into men's hearts (*se couler tout doucement ès coëurs des hommes*), etc. : what delightful words, how they seem to flow from the vein, how simple in their freedom ! A carping and peevish critic might point to redundancies on these same pages, and to Amyot's disposition to spin out and lengthen everything ; there is no doubt that with him we swim in superfluities : where Plutarch has two words, he uses three or four, or even six ; but what matter to us as long as these words are the most felicitous, and of such a kind that the reader who knows only French will at once notice them with a smile of delight ? Sometimes Amyot dilutes Plutarch's expression, but for the most part he is content with displaying and unfolding it, to offer it in a lighter shape. Besides these pages from the *Life of Numa*, we should recall other equally well-known passages from the *Life of Lycurgus*, in which is clearly and graphically defined the character of the young Spartan warriors before and during the battle (chaps. xliv–xlix). When a language can show such pages, which continue throughout the whole *tenor* of a translation of such length, that language, as regards its prose, appears to lack nothing that can be desired.

The every-day language of Amyot is, undeniably, the simple *easy* and *flowing* language of narrative, or, in other words, that *mixed* and *temperate* language which is addressed to the gentler passions : but when his model demands it, he is capable of attaining 'that loftier, most effective and solemn language, which, flowing swiftly as a torrent, carries the hearer with it.' In soberness, simplicity and grandeur, no pages are finer than those on the death of Pompey. M. de Chateaubriand was of this opinion when he read them after his return from the East, with his mind still full of memories of the historic

shores he had visited : ' In my opinion, he said, that is the finest bit in Plutarch, and in his translator Amyot.'

What charming pages too in the *Moral Treatises* of Plutarch, how rich in sense, how easy and natural, with a suggestion of Montaigne ! These are the treasures, so new at that time, so abundant and so limpid, treasures of morality, treasures of heroism, which Amyot first poured into the torrent of circulation in the sixteenth century, that corrupt and fanatical century, as if to purify and humanise it, and which won the universal recognition, the eternal thanks of all honest hearts.

The younger generation, which delights in the things of Love, has been no less grateful to him, then and since, for his fascinating translation of the little romance of *Daphnis and Chloë*, a masterpiece which Paul-Louis Courier has touched up, corrected and restored, with regard to the sense, whilst leaving undisturbed the pretty and naïve expressions of the first interpreter, and imitating them to the best of his power in the un-edited parts he has rediscovered. The study of this little tableau renders it easier to form an idea of the method followed by Amyot in translating. In the style of Longus we find, in many places, sentences interwoven one within the other, with the members symmetrically and artistically coupled together, and frequently with a sort of rhyme or assonance : all this smacks of the laboured trifling of the rhetorician. Amyot, on the other hand, launches upon the narrative, simply and with more freedom ; he connects the periods, he introduces little explanatory sentences, which break the too regular and affected rhythm. There is no more of that straining after antitheses, so frequent in Longus, whether in ideas or words. There is more flexibility ; his sentence flows like a natural sentence by an original author, who does not dream of struggling and jousting. It is, in a way, a translation such as La Fontaine might have produced, or (shall I venture to say so ?) the amiable Saint Francis of Sales, if for a moment we could imagine him young, not yet a saint, a Hellenist and in love :

* At the beginning of spring, when the snow was melting, the earth throwing off its covering and the grass and herbs beneath it springing up ; the other shepherds led their beasts to the meadows : but before all Daphnis and Chloe, as those who served a much greater shepherd ;

and immediately they hastened straight to the cave of the Nymphs, and from thence to the pine, under which stood the statue of Pan, and then under the oak-tree, where they sat down and watched their flocks grazing . . . then went to pick flowers, to make chaplets for the images (*The good Amyot, in his piety, did not dare to say* : to make crowns for the Gods), but they were only beginning to peep out of the ground, through the gentleness of the little cherub Zephyr who was opening the earth, and the heat of the sun which warmed them.'

If you expect to find the *little cherub Zephyr* (*petit bœuf de Zéphyr*) in the original Greek, you will be much mistaken ; it is Amyot who lends to that breeze the charm and prettiness of an angel, to compensate himself no doubt for not daring to call Pan and the sylvan Nymphs Gods.

In his Prefaces, in his Dedications, in the few pages of his own, Amyot is feeble, except in some rare passages ; he writes less well on his own account than when he translates. It has been remarked of his original work, that the style appears to be *strangely heavy and to drag*. It is a harsh judgment, but, once delivered, it is true all the same. Amyot thinks little on his own initiative ; he confines himself within moral platitudes : then he cannot stop, he does not know where to finish his sentence nor to cut it short. M. de Blignières, who tries, as filially as he can, to cover the weak sides of his author, is himself obliged to admit it. We might, however, find in Amyot, when he speaks in his own name, a few pages written with the quiet eloquence of an old man ; but his forte, his talent, lies elsewhere : he shows his peculiar genius only when he is borne on the shoulders of another, when he translates ; he is original and quite at his ease only when he swims in the full current of thought of one of his favourite authors. Here he is truly the first, and the king of translators : in any other respect he could only be regarded as an original author who has taken the wrong road.

The reader has begun to have an inkling of the reproaches which Amyot's translations have incurred, and which have mingled with his praises. Even in Montaigne's day a few readers, more difficult to please than others, pointed out Amyot's faults. One day, being in Rome, at the table of the French ambassador, and in presence of a most learned company, Montaigne had a dispute on the subject of Amyot's Plutarch, of which more than

one of the company had a much smaller estimation than himself. Certain passages were adduced in proof, and Montaigne admitted honestly that he had to alter his opinion with regard to the correctness of details he had supposed to exist in Amyot's work. But I doubt whether his admiration of the excellent author in general was at all diminished, and in my opinion he was right.

These two points, indeed, may be defended, and are by no means incompatible. Amyot, in his translation of Plutarch, may have been guilty of all the faults and inaccuracies, whether of meaning, historical, geographical or mythological, etc., which he has been taxed with, and which Méziriac claimed to have observed in *more than two thousand passages*; yet his merit as a writer is not by any means affected; for this merit is of quite a different order, and it is none the less true, as Vaugelas said, that nobody knew the genius and the character of the language better than he, that nobody employed words and phrases so naturally French, without any mixture of provincial forms of speech: 'All the store-houses and all the treasures of the true French language, continues Vaugelas in his enthusiasm for good speech and good expression, are found in the works of this great man, and even to-day we have hardly any noble and magnificent forms of speech which we have not inherited from him; and although we have given up the half of his phrases and words, we still find in the remaining half almost all the wealth that we boast and make a show of.' All this is still correct and incontestable. Amyot more than any man prepared and contributed to this gradual settling down and maturing of the language, by the influence he so long and efficaciously exercised, and he did so not only instinctively and in practice, but with a full consciousness of what he was aiming at. He aimed in fact, above all at a style that was accurate, clear, chastened, in short *select*, that is to say, choice and elegant in its naturalness: 'We will choose,' he said, the words which are *most appropriate* to signify the thing we wish to speak of, those which appear to us the *most harmonious*, which *sound best to the ear*, which are *most customarily in the mouth of good speakers*, which are *good French and not foreign*.' That was what Amyot proposed to himself, and in fact realised, in the vast and fertile expansion of

his translations. With a genius that was no doubt in many respects inferior to Ronsard's, he went in quite a different direction, his purpose was quite the opposite of Ronsard's, and, as a prose-writer who has ever gained more and more in favour, he has merited at the hands of posterity all the favour which was withheld from the hapless poet. The one has been treated, I think, with excessive harshness and injustice, but the favour shown to the other has been no more than just.

I have read again the most serious piece of criticism, unfavourable to Amyot, that has been written, and in my opinion, it is by no means to be despised: namely, the *Discourse on Translation* (*Discours de la Traduction*), by M. de Méziriac, which was read before the French Academy at the end of the year 1635, and which is entirely at the expense of Amyot. Méziriac, mathematician, geographer, mythographer, man of science and learning on every subject, in this work criticises with excessive severity all the errors and omissions of the good Amyot in his Plutarch; he speaks of him in a haughty and superior tone, as 'a good Rhetoric-class pupil, who had an indifferent knowledge of Greek, and some slight tincture of good Letters.' It is curious to remark, reading this piece of work, how many blunders go to make up, in the eyes of a scholar by profession, a literary and popular reputation. But the question with regard to Amyot does not lie in that direction: it does not lie with the Scaligers, the Méziriacs, and the savants whose names end in *-us*; it lies with the public, with readers of all classes, with all the world. They, with Montaigne at their head, are his real judges. I readily admit that Amyot, with all his learning, was still no more than what we might call a *great Humanist*, a Rollin with a genius for style. His faults, which a Méziriac so acrimoniously animadverts upon, will be corrected without much trouble by other scholars, more charitable and with a better taste than he. Men of the stamp of Brotier, Clavier, Paul-Louis Courier, will issue editions of Amyot in which the faults have disappeared, and the excellent style will remain: as for ourselves his descendants, when Amyot is in question, that is our inheritance.

I have mentioned Rollin, and this name recurs appropriately in this place; for it seems to me that that good

man, whom Montesquieu called ‘the bee of France,’ also belonged to that class of moderate, humble, I might almost say somewhat inferior minds when left to their own resources, who, in order to attain to their full value, needed to be backed and sustained by Antiquity. Well, Rollin has also been very severely criticised by Gibert, by the Abbé Bellanger, and these stern critics have the right on their side almost on every point against him, which does not alter the fact, however, that Montesquieu was also right in his memorable eulogy of that historian.

Now, Amyot is a greater Rollin, who appeared upon the scene a hundred and fifty years before him, who had the initiative in his sphere, who first set the example of a great translation from Greek into French, and who had the genius of diction whenever the thought of an Ancient smiled upon him.

To omit nothing essential, and not to appear too ignorant myself, I will remind my readers that, leaving aside these inaccuracies of detail, there is a certain general inaccuracy that Amyot has been charged with, especially in our own days: namely, that he has given to Plutarch a character of simplicity, or at least of *naïveté* and *bonhomie*, which are not to be found in the original. ‘The boldness of Plutarch, says M. Villemain, sometimes vanishes in the happy and naïve diffusiveness of Amyot.’—‘Amyot, adds M. Vinet, deceives us with regard to the true character of Plutarch; but what is admirable, is that nothing betrays this involuntary falsification.’ M. de Chateaubriand had already said of Plutarch: ‘He is only an agreeable impostor in naïve turns of expression.’ Amyot removes the impostor, and lends him the naïve. Others, like Montaigne, as we have seen, have spoken of the style of Plutarch as of a *thorny and hard* author. ‘All men of learning know, says Méziriac, that the style of Plutarch is *very concise* and has nothing Asiatic about it.’ But do you think that Amyot was not the very first to know all these things? In his Notice *To the Readers*, at the head of his *Lives* of Plutarch, he excuses himself if the language of his translation ‘does not perhaps appear as flowing as that of his preceding translations; but a translator, he says, must be faithful to the tone, to the form of style of his author, and if his new translation appears less easy than

the others, account should be taken of the fashion of writing peculiar to Plutarch, which is *pointed, learned and concise (pressé) rather than clear, polished and easy*. This it was that made Montaigne say that the proper author he proposed for a labour naturally adapted for the good Amyot in his old age, was Xenophon, because the style of the good man 'is more at home *when it is not concise (pressé)*, when it rolls at its ease.' It would remain to be seen if nowadays, as the result of priding ourselves on our better understanding of the real Plutarch, we have not exaggerated some faults of this great and incomparable biographer.

We may add in the last place that the modern reader himself attributes more *bonhomie* to Amyot's style than it possesses in reality. It is the effect of every antiquated style to appear simple and childlike; and Amyot, in his own day and in his newness, did not in that respect appear quite as he appears to us to-day. The men of learning will permit me to submit another idea to them. It would be as unjust to call Plutarch a Sophist as to call St. Augustine one. Plutarch, like St. Augustine, has the faults of his time: which do not make his own originality and generosity the less. We must not forget that Montaigne called him *the most judicious author in the world*. In our days, more rhetoric perhaps and more artifice have been imputed to Plutarch than he possesses naturally, and on the other hand, to Amyot have been attributed more simplicity and *bonhomie* than belongs to him, and thus the disagreement has been exaggerated.

In any case, this light and rather happy inaccuracy of the excellent translator has contributed in a considerable degree to his charm and his reputation. The confusion of Plutarch with Amyot has been continual, and, in spite of all the efforts of a few critics, they have not succeeded in breaking the association. Henry IV wrote of Plutarch: 'To love him is to love me.' And it was through Amyot that he loved him. So it is with almost all his readers. Amyot's *Plutarch*, that Plutarch who is a little more natural perhaps than the other, the real one, and more *debonair* (and so much the better!), has for ever taken up his abode, as one and the same treasure-house of antique probity and virtue, in the memory and gratitude of man. These are ideas that even learning has come to

respect. There is a certain piety too (and what should we gain by destroying it ?) connected with the memory of Plutarch and Homer.

One could write a most interesting chapter on the subject of Amyot's reputation, or rather M. de Blignières has already done so. We have seen the commendations of Vaugelas, who proclaimed Amyot one of the Fathers of our language. Amyot, with his excellent French of Melun, was at the time much more approved by the nascent Academy than was Montaigne, who was suspected of neologisms and *Gasconisms*. Boileau rallied the Abbé Tallemant, who presumed to translate Plutarch, by calling him *the dry translator of Amyot's French*. Racine read Amyot to Louis XIV, and through his skilful reading the King came to like him. Fénelon, in his *Letter to the Academy*, cited Amyot as an example of what was most worthy to be revived in the old language. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Massillon appears to me often as an Amyot in the pulpit, on account of the fullness and economy of his sentences, as well as the rich and rather diffuse abundance of his morality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre gained much from Amyot ; Rousseau as a child had no more favourite reading than Plutarch, and through Amyot drank from the springs of the purest and least Genevese of languages. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who continually quotes Plutarch, does so only from Amyot's version. A critic of our own days whom I love to cite as the most refined and delicate of minds, M. Joubert, who speaks admirably and without any literary superstition of Plutarch, has said : 'The old French prose was entirely modified by the style of Amyot, and the character of the work he had translated. In France, Amyot's translation has become an original work.' That was my starting-point, and will also be my only conclusion.

MALLET DU PAN¹

Monday, 1 September 1851.

'THE Revolution counts four writers :

Mme de Staël,

Burke,

Rivarol, in the political-national newspaper,
Mallet du Pan.'

It was the Abbé de Pradt who wrote these words at the beginning of one of his books (*Les Quatre Concordats*) ; and, without regarding as oracular all the utterances of that witty person, it is right that we should take his opinion into account, especially in a discussion upon the style of political pamphlets and brochures, the style that takes and bites with the public, even in serious matters : the Abbé de Pradt was a good judge of the matter. Of the four names he cites, three are still unanimously greeted and acknowledged : Mme de Staël and Burke are outside the line of comparison ; Rivarol, who is less read nowadays, has left behind him a brilliant name and so to say a long luminous trail. But who is there among the younger or even the intermediate generations of the present day that knows Mallet du Pan ? He is only remembered by those who belonged to the reading public before 1800. Thanks to the *Memoirs* which are to appear in a few days and which we are happy to announce to the public, everybody will henceforth know him, render him the justice that is his due, and see him in the high rank he deserves to occupy in public esteem.

Mallet du Pan was a Genevan who early devoted himself to solid study and criticism, who came to Paris

¹ *Memoirs and Correspondence of Mallet du Pan*, collected and arranged by M. A. Sayous. 4 vols., octavo. 1851. (Amyot and Cherbellez.)

about 1783 and was entrusted by Panckoucke with the editing of the political part of the *Mercure*. When the Revolution broke out, when the struggles of the Constituent Assembly engaged the attention of Europe, Mallet du Pan, in the *Mercure*, was the only writer who succeeded, without any insult or flattery, in supplying reasoned analyses of those great debates. His reports assumed from that time the highest importance : 'For three years, his discussions of the debates were regarded throughout Europe as models of lucidity and impartiality,' said Lally-Tolendal. And Bonald, for once overcoming all his prejudice against a Calvinistic writer and a friend of rational liberty, spoke in 1796¹ of the 'excellent political, and we might say prophetic, pictures of the French Revolution, which M. Mallet du Pan published in the *Mercure de France*.' Only quitting his post as a courageous and independent writer at the last extremity, on the eve of the 20 June and the 10 August 1792, Mallet du Pan was charged by Louis XVI with a confidential mission to the sovereigns, which was without effect. He published, at Brussels in 1793, his *Considérations sur la Nature de la Révolution de France*, a little book which caused a sensation in Europe, and which Burke declared might have been written by himself. To Mallet du Pan, then in retirement in Switzerland, Joseph de Maistre, though personally unacquainted with him, sent his first political manuscript, with the request to have it printed if he thought it worth publishing. The note from the Catholic and Ultramontane de Maistre to the man he chose for the sponsor of his first work, began as follows : 'Sir, whoever has read you esteems you . . .' Mallet du Pan was besides the friend who was most nearly allied in opinions to the Malouets, the Mouniers, the Montlosiers, and later to the Portalis. Often consulted, but to no purpose, by the guiding Ministers of the great powers, Mallet du Pan remained in Switzerland as long as Switzerland was really republican and independent. Forced to quit the country and expelled by the menaces of the Directoire, he had no refuge but in England : there he again took up his independent pen, telling truth to all, and first of all to the incorrigible émigrés. His *Mercure*

¹ In the 8th note of the second book of his *Théorie du Pouvoir*.

Britannique is a publication that deserves to be consulted for the history of the time. He died of exhaustion at his work and in harness, on the 10 May 1800, in his fifty-first year, poor and stainless, highly esteemed and considered by all who had known him. His son who, with his mother, remained in England, immediately obtained through the influence of his father's friends, an honourable and modest post, and has lived there since without any interruption. Himself an old man, he now feels it his duty to pay a long-deferred tribute to his father's memory, by publishing the manuscripts, letters and correspondence, in a word all the papers of Mallet du Pan that are likely to interest the public of the future. A pathetic letter from M. Mallet to his old friend Comte Portalis, First President of the Court of Cassation, serves as a dedication : it begins under good auspices. Having become, in consequence of his long absence, too unfamiliar with the English language to take upon himself the work of editing, which was needed in order to connect and explain the large number of documents which had to be taken into account, M. Mallet entrusted this delicate task to a writer of Geneva, M. André Sayous, already known by some excellent works on literary history, who, in this service rendered to all friends of sound ideas and judicious historical researches, has won his right of citizenship in France.

Those who read these Memoirs it will be henceforth clear that Mallet du Pan deserves a foremost rank among the most enlightened observers and critics of the last century. As a journalist and political writer, who had taken upon himself the rude task of comprehending and embracing the stormy and complicated events as they hurried past him, no man has been more often right, when in hand, than he. Prudent, circumspect, never carried away by passion, he is as rarely mistaken as it is possible to be in the chances of such a fray. With his degree of prevision and perspicacity, Mallet du Pan stands in common with that school and that nature of St.aph de Maistre, with whom he agreed only for a moment : he is a quite positive and less sublime apologist, bringing into human matters no other element but those which lend themselves to observation, anything but a prophet and a seer : he is only a man of strong mind

and sense, of great perspicacity and foresight. He belongs, in the best sense, to that Genevese, almost Scotch school, of writers, the school of precise observation and moral sense. As a writer do not expect to find in him either grace, or brilliance, or flow of language : but, in spite of the ruggedness of his pen and diction, when the truth seizes him, he finds energetic, even picturesque touches, which, when stigmatising social miseries and vicious opinions, have the precision of a passionate man of science. In all that he writes we feel 'the virile reason and power of intelligence given by reflexion, freedom and conviction.' Do not forget that he is a Republican by birth and affection, a true citizen of Geneva, this man who, prompted by good sense and the power of truth, is obliged to declare to the France of '89 and '92 that she is not fitted for a Republic, and that the French need thirty years of preliminary education to prepare them for any exercise of freedom ; he is a Republican who is only forced by the evidence of reason to be a Royalist, and because he cannot write against his conscience. There lies his secret inspiration and the spring of his energy : he bears within him two conflicting elements which he masters by dint of straightforwardness. Hence this publicist, so often insulted, so often calumniated, who was not always able to keep his own pen from harsh injustice and invective, imprints on the whole of his pages a stamp of elevation, of self-respect and dignity, arising from the purity of his intentions and his fundamental disinterestedness, which becomes a lesson for all of us to-day. But enough of generalities : let us consider Mallet du Pan a little in detail.

Born on the shores of the Lake of Geneva in 1749, of a Protestant father, he received his education at the College and the Academy of Geneva ; there he contracted his early habits of correct thinking, his turn for dialectics and reasoning. Possessed of an ardent soul whose fire turned toward serious subjects, hardly had he left the school benches when he took part in the discussions and dissensions which then stirred that little Republic, and he committed his first extravagances, his first excesses even ; for it is written for each of us that *youth must have its fling*. So at twenty-one Mallet wrote a pamphlet which, having regard to the conditions

of the little Republic, might appear revolutionary : he generously espoused the cause of the numerous inhabitants called *natives* (as who should say the *tiers-état* of the place) who were not represented. It would take too long, however, to explain the matter in detail. Briefly, Mallet had his enthusiastic period and had the satisfaction of seeing his first brochure condemned and burned in his native town, as Rousseau's *Emile* had been eight years before. This petty persecution procured him the friendship of Voltaire, who did not hesitate to make him a Professor of History and to despatch him in that capacity to the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel. Mallet did not remain there long, and returned as he had gone : 'I was thrown into his (the Landgrave of Hesse's) forests at a venture, he said, he received me at a venture, and I left them at a venture. All that was the result of prompt feelings, the most excusable of which was that which drove me away with the whip of honour, of disgust and of every kind of self-interest.' These first disappointments and these different schoolings completed his education, and he learned life and the world of reality.

Having returned from Germany to Geneva, and contracted an early marriage, according to the custom of his country, Mallet sought an outlet for his tastes and his ardour for study and polemics. He was seized with admiration, from a distance, for Linguet, who only appeared to him in the light of an unjustly persecuted man of eloquence and daring. When Linguet, enjoying the honours of this persecution, came to Geneva and Ferney, Mallet saw him and enlisted under his flag as a collaborator in the *Annales politiques, civiles et littéraires*. We could wish him to have had another sponsor than Linguet, remarks M. Sayous ; but one does not choose one's sponsor any more than one's parents, and one enters the world, even the literary world, as best one may. I must hasten over this first part of Mallet du Pan's life. Linguet having contrived to be put into the Bastille in 1779, Mallet undertook to continue his *Annales*, a kind of political and literary review, and single-handed was equal to the burden. The first labours of this young man, who had already reached the age of thirty, show that he was possessed of independence of judgment, the habit of having his own opinion on every matter

without asking his neighbour's permission, and the need to express this opinion openly and before the public. Mallet du Pan was evidently by his vocation an observer, and one of those who love to communicate their observations to others.

The journeys he had to take to London and Brussels, during this collaboration with Linguet, furnished his meditative mind with points of comparison. Judging French men of letters and philosophers as yet from a distance and from their writings, Mallet du Pan showed that he was not the man to be dazzled by a nearer view of them. Speaking of the Abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique*, he reflects, in his *Annales* (15 June 1781), on its ridiculous or dangerous declamations : ' Whatever their opinions, he asked, let the philosophers consider the morals of our age, and let them tell us if the moment has come for lessening the motives for being virtuous. . . . How much remorse would M. Raynal not feel, if his fanaticism were to poison one ploughman's cottage or one artisan's workshop ! If he were read among those obscure classes, what would his incendiary maxims bring them but powerful regrets and the rage of despair ? '

While judging with this strict good sense the excesses and frenzies of the philosophers, Mallet du Pan was able to keep within the bounds of moderation. He did so in the case of Voltaire, who was then dead, and whom he had known for eight consecutive years in private life ; he noted his errors, but did not embrace all the opinions and works of that brilliant genius in one anathema. A lively controversy began on the publication of the complete edition of Voltaire's Works, begun in 1781. A few of the readers of the *Annales* thought it astonishing that Mallet, who professed to be Linguet's successor, should not have risen up against that *revolting* enterprise. He received some anonymous letters : ' You will see, wrote one, in the accompanying printed paper the cry of public indignation.' And the letter was accompanied by a copy of the *Dénonciation au Parlement de la Souscription des Œuvres de Voltaire*, with this motto : *Ululate et clamate*. Mallet wrote in a printed reply : ' I was already acquainted with all the violent attacks that had been made upon Voltaire, on the occasion of the Subscription to his complete Works. The *Ululate*

et clamore of the anonymous denouncer have not succeeded in subduing me. I persist in not *howling*, and here are my reasons.' And he stated them with justness, good sense, moderation, and without deplored and stigmatising any the less forcibly all that deserved condemnation in Voltaire. From that moment it was possible to more than foresee in Mallet du Pan one of those minds that are able to reconcile ideas and qualities of different nature, that do not incline all to one side, that set themselves precise limits in different tendencies, a man in short to whom Mme de Staël one day wrote that she could have wished to see and talk with him, if only to hear things spoken of with reason and justice, and to find a repose 'from extreme opinions, the resource of those who can only embrace one idea at a time.'

He very well justified that motto which he had inscribed on the last volume of his *Annales*: *Nec temere, nec timide.* Neither temerity nor weakness, that was the motto of his whole life.

When he decided to migrate with his family to Paris, about 1783 or 1784, Mallet was nearly thirty-five years of age; he was mature, and he arrived upon the great stage with all the qualities and in the most proper frame of mind to criticise it accurately. In that restricted and contentious household of Geneva he had seen on a small scale the possible nature of political revolutions, in which human passions travel in a circle; like a scientist he had made his experiments with little losses, but with a sure eye and a precision which was not to be deceived a second time. On arriving on the great stage of Paris, he found a whole nation full of delusions, and intoxicated especially in the persons of its leaders; a nation that was a prey to limitless theories and every kind of hope. He conceived an immediate distrust of that tattered and dissolute monarchy, which, resting on beds of roses or starting for the Opera, flattered itself that it had but to promulgate a few abstract principles to secure a universal emancipation and the felicity of the world. All these modern doctors, 'accustomed to govern with words the entire globe, from the extreme point of Spitzbergen to the Cape of Good Hope,' did not impose upon him in the least. He knows how much more important

are the practical and useful truths of political economy than all those great principles, and how difficult it is to have them accepted and to apply them in the proper measure to each State at an opportune time: 'The rural economist who is not a talker, he wrote, and to whom in France we owe the cultivation of the potato; the Zurich peasant who doubled the produce of his meadows, have done more for society than a thousand treatises on luxury, whose authors have not stopped the sale of a yard of lace, than a mass of hypotheses on wealth, from which the poor man has not profited by a crown's worth.' But French society at this date, quite carried away by a feverish mania for universal regeneration, was far from that spirit of application and moderate medication that it hardly ever knew. One heard nothing but general theories and universal panaceas proclaimed with a flourish of trumpets. 'In 1788, says Mallet somewhere, I heard Marat read and comment on the *Contrat social*, on the public promenades, amid the applause of an enthusiastic audience.'¹

A *Journal intime* of Mallet, from which are given extracts and which contains his observations on Paris, from 1785 to 1789, carries us back to the life of the times and into the most lively scenes in the war of the Court against the Parliaments. The inconsistency, the inconsequence of the measures, all that series of frivolities and temerities, of futile *coups d'Etat*, which brought on the convocation of the States - General, is graphically presented by Mallet: 'No combination on the means of successfully carrying out the operation, he says in reference to the Bed of Justice which suspended the Parliaments (8 May 1788); nothing but a disappointed hope of dividing, bribing and winning the Grand'Chambre, the Châtelet, etc. In all this we see men adopting, on the authority of books, philosophical ideas, but destitute of ministerial ideas.' And when in the following September, on the day of its reopening, the Parliament, in order to moderate the tumultuous scenes which accompanied

¹ From an article by Mallet published in the second volume, page 342, of the *Mémoire britannique*, and headed: *Du degré d'influence qu'a eue la Philosophie française sur la Révolution*. I recommend this article to all who wish to classify with precision and without injustice the writers of the eighteenth century according to their degree of kinship with the Revolution.

its ovation, issued an order against gatherings of the mob, fireworks, rockets, etc.: 'The people laughed at its order as if it were a King's prohibition; for it must always be observed that in France neither the law, nor the power emanating from it, are respected except in so far as they force respect by fear. No man obeys when he feels that he can disobey with impunity.' This was Mallet's firm and sound frame of mind and power of judgment when, the press having become free and the Constituent Assembly aspiring to supreme authority, he was called upon to report its sittings in the political part of the *Mercure*, of which he had been for five years editor.

Observe that as long as the *ancien régime* endured, Mallet, a political writer, had been as independent as it was possible to be with *three censors*; often warned, reprimanded by the Minister, he had never received either pension or favour, differing in this respect from so many other men of letters who were pensioned and rewarded by Calonne or by the Court, and who became Republicans.

To enable us better to appreciate the loyal and scrupulous manner in which Mallet conceived his new task and carried it out, M. Sayous ingeniously parallels it with the quite contrary method affected and professed by the sophistical littérateur Garat, who reported the political sittings for the *Journal de Paris*. This indiscreet Garat, opening his heart to Condorcet in 1792, wrote, in reference to the scenes in the Constituent Assembly (such confessions are worth collecting at all times):

' You know, Sir, that at these same epochs the sittings of the National Assembly, whence started all the movements and whether all came to re-echo and repeat themselves, were much less deliberations than actions and events. To-day there is no objection in saying it, these stormy sittings were struggles of passions rather than struggles of opinions; we heard shouts rather than speeches; they appeared more likely to end in battles than in decrees. Twenty times, on leaving, in order to describe them, these stormy meetings which were prolonged so far into the night, and forgetting in the darkness and silence of the streets of Versailles or Paris the agitations that I had shared, have I confessed to myself that if anything was capable of arresting the Revolution and forcing it back, it was a picture of these sittings drawn without precaution and without any consideration, by a soul and a pen that were known to be free. Ah! Sir, how far I was from doing so, and how guilty I should have been! I was convinced that all would have been lost, both our liberty and the fairest hopes of the human race, if the National Assembly ceased for a moment to be, in the eyes of the nation, the worthiest object of

their respect, their love and all their expectations. All my care were devoted therefore to presenting the truth, but without making it appalling : of what had been nothing less than a tumult I made a picture ; I sought and I seized, in the confusion and the turmoil of that sanctuary of the laws, those features which had a character and an interest for the imagination. I prepared people's minds to assist at a kind of dramatic action rather than at a meeting of legislators ; I described the actors before bringing them into action ; I reproduced all their opinions, but not always with the same expressions ; their shouts became words, their furious gestures became attitudes, and, when I was unable to inspire esteem, I tried to excite emotions.'

Garat, as we see, was a master rhetorician. He said one day of one of his relations : 'So and so is not a liar, but he has a fault, which is that he cannot say things as they are.' That is just what he did himself, as we have just heard ; and it was in this dramatic fashion, and through this deceptive prism, that the scenes of that stormy epoch have too often appeared to us, and that the eyes of those who were not contemporaries have been abused and imposed upon. Mallet was not like that : he belonged to that historical and moral school which is strict and scrupulous, and which does not connive at those compromises, those medleys in which imagination and a spurious sensibility, under fine pretexts, place themselves at the service of fear, baseness and self-interests :

'Contemporaries and posterity, he said in describing his principles and his method of writing, should without doubt judge a Legislative Assembly by its acts, and not by its speeches : In this they imitate history and the law, which confines itself to pronouncing judgment on men's actions. Still, it is part of the duties of the chronicler of his time to record, together with the resolutions, the motives which determined them, and the combat of opinions among which they hovered. . . .

'Facts alone, accurately told, arranged with order, freed from the prolixities which are inseparable from spoken eloquence, that is what history will one day consult, that is what the public expect and what we owe them.'

'Faithful, besides, to the plan that we set before ourselves from the outset, we will never lose sight of Tacitus' precept : *Principum munus Annalium.* . . .'

'My purpose, said Tacitus, speaking of the deliberations of the Senate under Tiberius, is not to report all the opinions of the senators ; I limit myself to those which offer a character remarkable for honour or opprobrium, convinced that it is the principal object of history to preserve virtues from oblivion, and to restrain speeches and vicious actions by the fear of infamy and of posterity.'

That was Mallet's program, the program of an historian rather than of a journalist, as somebody rightly said. And how desirable it would be if the political journalist considered himself in this way as an historian by the day, a *pioneer historian*, who does not enjoy all the honours of the other, but who has all his duties, who anticipates his burdens, and who may some day gain his deserts by the careful acknowledgment of a rewarding posterity! In this respect Mallet du Pan, in spite of the unavoidable rudeness and personal severities of his pen, offers a kind of model for honesty, consistency and courage, and he is the most commendable of our forerunners. It is only just that a tardy ray should to-day fall on his thoughtful and serious brow.

The analysis of Mallet du Pan's labours for the *Mercure* would be that of the three first years of the Revolution. He declares himself from the first day against exaggerations, from whatever direction they may come. He favours mixed governments, the only kind he thought compatible with true liberty when it is really and sincerely desired by a great nation: that means that he does not by any means share the exaggerations of the pure Right, and he is in many respects, we may affirm, as far removed from the Abbé Maury as from the Abbé Sieyès. His line, which is soon broken and destroyed, is that of Constitutionalists like Mounier, Lally; but, more resolute than they and more of a soldier, he remains in the breach, he does not quit the field of battle at the approach of the victors; he stands firm till the last moment, and as long as there is room for a table and a sheet of paper. 'As far as I have been able to know you from reading your works, Joseph de Maistre (a man however of a different line) wrote to him, it appears to me that you love to do justice. That is the part you have played to the very last; and truly when you left your tribunal, it was time.' In a pamphlet he wrote at Brussels in 1793, and in which he parted company with the violent and heedless Émigrés, speaking himself in the name of the true Royalists: 'More than once, said Mallet du Pan, I have been their mouthpiece, and they have never disowned me. Though a foreigner and a Republican, I have won at the price of four years spent without ever being certain on going to bed that I should wake up next morning free or alive,

at the price of three writs of arrest, of a hundred and fifteen denunciations, of being twice placed under seals, of four *civic* assaults in my own house, and of the confiscation of all my property in France, I have won, I say, the rights of a Royalist; and as this leaves me nothing more to gain than the guillotine, I think that nobody will be tempted to dispute my claim.' Indeed, more than once, during the exercise of his courageous editorship, Mallet saw his house in the Rue de Tournon¹ invaded, and was forced to reply to the more or less officious warnings of the zealots of the Luxembourg Section.

M. Sayous has very ably analysed and made extracts from the principal and fine parts of Mallet's writings in the *Mercure*. It is creditable to Mallet and touching to see him, a Protestant, I may even say a Deist,² or at least a simply religious man, contenting himself, when on the point of death, with devoutly reading M. Romilly's sermons on resignation and the immortality of the soul, and to see him generously, and from a feeling of pure justice, taking up the defence of the Catholic clergy when speaking of certain sittings in which, on the occasion of the civic oath, that oppressed Order had to submit to some real affronts :

' Posterity will easily understand, he says, the expropriation of the Clergy, the reduction of their revenues, the abolition of their privileges, the changes worked in their discipline; minds will be divided, fifty years hence as to-day, on the necessity of this reform; but they will regard with a trembling indignation the pitiless animosity with which the members of this unfortunate Order are being persecuted. They arouse the compassion even of the impious; strangers will learn with horror of the threats with which they have been overwhelmed for the last twenty months. Is it conceivable that with our effeminate manners we should also be cruel ? '

He often recurs to this connexion that he finds between effeminacy of character and the cruelty which springs from it. In depicting that corruption of morals which had preceded the Revolution and prepared the way for it : To complete it, he says somewhere very forcibly,

¹ And not the Rue Taranne, as wrongly printed in the *Memoirs*.

² Some people have objected to this word *Deist* applied to Mallet du Pan: is it necessary to say that to my mind it conveys no unfavourable idea, and that I take it in a sense that does not exclude a certain degree of Christianity?

it sufficed to let loose savage vices upon degrading vices, and to excite the brutal passions of the multitude against the passions of the effeminate.'

Having seen his domicile violated on the 21 June 1791, at the time of the King's flight, Mallet was forced to hide and to cease for a time his labour of editing the *Mercure*. But the subscribers complained, and, after two months of silence, Mallet once more took the burden upon his shoulders. Whilst thanking those who, in this interval, had accompanied their complaints with testimonies of interest and affection, he could not help reflecting with a bitter irony on the pretension of those other readers who 'appear to regard an author in our present conjuncture, he says, as a servant whom they have charged with defending their opinions, and who is expected to mount guard whilst they are asleep or enjoying themselves. They find it convenient that a man should make it his business to provide them every week, at the risk of his life, his liberty and his property, with a few pages of reading matter to amuse their passions while they are taking their morning chocolate.' Mallet had long been awake to the uselessness of the efforts of honest men and moderate and divided minds in presence of the growing factions. He knew the vices of the age, one of the greatest of which was scribbling : 'Scribbling, he repeated after Montaigne, is the symptom of a dissolute age.' Knowing the true ends of man, and that, in the social tempests, men are intended for action and not for reading, he was well aware that he himself, who spoke only to readers, was offering only an inadequate remedy : 'Heads steeped in an ocean of printed nonsense are no longer fit to guide themselves ; expect of them neither greatness nor energy ; these polished reeds will bend under the gusts of the wind, and never rise again.' — 'One cannot fight a storm with sheets of paper,' he often said.

But I, whose profession it is, come what may, to be a critic and a writer, cannot help saying : Do you not remark, as you go along, how strong and powerful is Mallet's style in its bluntness, how he carves his thought ; and the Abbé de Pradt, who called Mallet his master, counting him among the three or four writers born of the Revolution, was he not right ?

Nothing could be stranger and more brilliant than the

passages in which Mallet displayed the balance-sheet of the Constituent Assembly, and described the disabled condition of the country ; nothing more memorable than the picture which he drew of the wrongs and mistakes of the parties in April 1792, at the moment when he himself threw up the game which was no longer playable, abandoned the editorship of the *Mercure* after eight years of assiduous labours, three of which were years of desperate struggles, and prepared to leave France.

We meet with some of the same thoughts and the same quite poignant expressions in the pamphlet he published at Brussels in March 1793 (*CONSIDÉRATIONS SUR LA NATURE DE LA RÉVOLUTION DE FRANCE, et sur les causes qui en prolongent la durée*), in which he tells everybody great truths.

Mallet du Pan, coming from France with a secret mission from Louis XVI, greatly recommended besides to the attention of the Sovereigns and Cabinets as well as the emigrant Princes by his political editorship of the *Mercure*, found himself consulted, and solicited to speak in different directions at the same time. The Maréchal de Castries wrote to him on behalf of the Princes, the King's brothers : 'I have seen the impression your writings made on all right minds. . . . It is time to speak to the nation and enlighten it.' Mallet resumed his pen to speak not to the nation, which, at this time, was little at liberty to lend ear and understanding, but to the chiefs of the Cabinets and leaders of the Émigrés, to enlighten them, if it were possible, on those matters which, in his opinion, were reasonable and necessary ; for he saw only one means of bringing to a favourable conclusion that great *social war*, as he called it : which was to make war on the Revolution alone, on the Convention which summed up in itself the vital spirit of the Revolution, not on France.

The very opening of the pamphlet shows him as a disillusioned man who is brought back to the scene by a duty rather than by illusion or hope :

'When a man has reached the age of forty years, and is not absolutely destitute of judgment, he believes no more in the rule of experience than in that of reason : their teachings are lost on Governments as well as on nations ; and he is happy to count a hundred men in a generation who learn anything from human vicissitudes.'

'From time to time there arise a few statesmen who are superior to the events they are able to foresee, to prepare and to guide (*Frederick the Great, Franklin*, for example); but the world is ordinarily governed by routine of necessity, and the old Europe unfortunately contains more workmen than architects.'

However, the Revolution being no longer exclusively French, but cosmopolitan, 'every man,' remarks the author, 'is justified in showing uneasiness. . . . Every European is to-day a party in this last battle of Civilisation: we have body and soul on the breaking ship.' After this, Mallet resolutely enters upon the subject, and proceeds to the inspection of the evil and to search for what he believes to be the remedy.

At the outset we see that if Mallet is in favour of mixed governments and temperate monarchies; that if, born and brought up in his little Republic in the midst of popular disturbances, he has come to the conclusion that mixed governments are 'the only ones compatible with human nature, the only ones which permit of the rectitude and stability of the laws, the only ones in particular which are able to ally themselves with the moral degeneration which the modern nations have arrived at,' we see, I say, that if that is his profession of faith, it does not follow that he denies the powerful principle and the transporting force of Democracy: very much on the contrary, and it is for that reason that he dreads it: we must not make a mistake, he writes, 'of all forms of government, Democracy, in a great nation, is that which most strongly electrifies the passions and most quickly generalises them. It develops that love of domineering which forms the second instinct of man; give him his independence to-day, and to-morrow he will love it as a means of exercising authority, and, once escaped from the power of the laws, his first need will be to usurp it.'—'It is of the essence of a Democracy, he thinks again, to reach the pole as long as it is not arrested by any obstacle.'

Analysing with a terrible power of dissection the wrong and vague ideas, the sophistries of various kinds which have filtered into all heads in a nation enervated and distorted by epicureanism, Mallet du Pan shows how the evil has never been opposed but by impotent means and the hopes cherished by presumption and idleness: 'Mean-

while they went to sleep on wise saws and pamphlets : *Disorder brings order*, said profound reasoners ; *anarchy will recompose despotism*. *Democracy dies of itself* ; the nation is attached to its kings.' We feel that he is speaking especially to the Émigrés ; and, whilst the parties were feeding on their illusions and dreams, the Jacobins alone were firmly marching to their goal : ' The Jacobins alone formed a *faction*, the other parties were nothing more than *cabals*.' And he shows wherein consists this faction, its inner organisation, its affiliation throughout France, its quick, formidable resources, acting at once on all the evil passions of the human heart. ' Disorder is an effect which becomes an all-powerful cause when wielded by a power that is not counterbalanced by any other ' ; it grows by its own ravages, it gains strength, it becomes organised, it creates new interests, everything is linked. We think that it will limit itself ; but this kind of reasoning, which may be true for an historical period of some extent, is entirely deceptive for the short periods of years which are so essential in the life of a generation : ' Whilst this crowd of men of wit, he says, to whom the Revolution is still a seditious rising, await, like Horace's peasant, the flowing away of the stream ; whilst the talkers make speeches about the decline of arts and industries, few people observe that, by its destructive nature, the Revolution necessarily leads to *the military Revolution*.' He continues to argue in this sense with vigour and irony. His conclusion is that the revolutionary force, growing day by day, will be victorious, even against the whole of Europe, if this invading volcanic flame is merely opposed by a passionless, unconcerted war, a routine war, a war that does not draw its life and resources from the very heart of France. Now, there is, in his opinion, only one means, one chance of stimulating these alliances in the heart of France, and that is to declare openly and frankly that the cause so vigorously sustained by arms is not the cause of kings but of all nations, and of France before all others. Mallet proposed that the Government, while increasing in military efficiency and activity, and dropping the old slow strategic methods which were so fatal, should at the same time proclaim, by a striking public manifestation, that the war would not be waged indiscriminately against all

who had been concerned in the Revolution; that it should be declared a social war, and directed only against the Convention and the Jacobins, that the restoration of Royalty alone should be proposed to France, allowing to all shades of Royalists, even the most constitutional among them, full liberty to return; in a word, that everything should be done to eradicate the idea from people's minds that it was the cause of absolute kings that was to be maintained and asserted. If they did not succeed, 'I assert openly,' exclaims Mallet, 'that the Revolution would be indestructible.'—Evidently thinking of the heroes of Coblenz, he adds: 'We must therefore abandon to the *Gascons of politics* the idea that force alone would succeed in subduing the kingdom. The only possible submission, which, whilst destroying the foundations of a wild anarchy, would prevent fresh revolutions, will be that which results from the union of *force* and *persuasion*'.

This pamphlet of Mallet's, written and published in the very midst of the Émigrés, caused a terrible sensation. 'One must write with a red-hot iron to excite any sensation to-day,' he had said. He had touched the sore with this red-hot iron. The most hot-headed of the Émigrés at Brussels, assembled in the Park, denounced him as a P^republican and spoke of hanging him after starting the counter-revolution. Montlosier, a fervent friend, was like a lion in his defence. The Maréchal de Castries, a friend of the Princes, who had attracted the fire-brand, a little frightened by him. In a letter dated the 1st September 1793, Mallet explained to the Marshall that he was neutral, a man of no consequence and perfectly disinterested, he thought it lay in his power to expound impartially, for the benefit of foreign Cabinets, several considerations which would not have been listened to for two minutes from any other mouth:

'I asked them to try to impress upon their minds the certainty and the extent of the danger, to combat it everywhere, and above all with real weapons, and to dismiss from their minds the idea that with a few sieges, a few systematic manœuvres and the taking of a few towns, they would succeed in even scratching the monster.'—'This pamphlet, he continued, has produced quite a sensation in some of the Cabinets: it was to them, to all who have any influence in this crisis, that I addressed it, and not to the crowd of fools and madmen, deprived of their reason by misfortunes, whose bursts of passion are only pardonable in

consideration of the sufferings which occasion them. It is quite natural that adversity should unhinge minds that have not been brought up in it ; it is quite natural that it should have given them *neither an idea, nor a lesson, nor any notion whatever.*

We see that Mallet knew his friends the Émigrés : they were indeed in 1793 the same people we saw return in 1814, to fall again in 1830.

He knew equally well the Cabinets of Europe, and, whilst giving them his advice, had little hope in them. Counsels of this kind, indeed, have no chance of succeeding except when they reach the minds of statesmen who are strong enough to dispense with them and to advise themselves.

I have only touched upon this publication of Mallet du Pan's Memoirs, out of which looms more and more distinctly during the seven following years this vigorous writer, this champion devoted to the cause of European society and civilisation with his fundamental love of liberty. I ask permission to return to him again. In frequently quoting, as I do with a certain pleasure, the powerful thoughts of a few political writers of former days, I have no intention by the way to propose direct remedies for our present ills and anxieties ; there are no such sovereign remedies.—'The art of governing, the elder Portals said very truly in a letter to Mallet, is not a metaphysical and absolute theory. This art is subordinate to the changes that take place in a people and to the situation in which they find themselves.' I have but one desire, that is to present to those minds that do me the honour of following me a few serious ideas which are not foreign to our times.

MALLET DU PAN

II

Monday, 8 Septembre 1851.

THE novelty and opportuneness of this publication have decided me to speak of it again this week. Those who open these volumes will find at every page thoughts which appear to be addressed to us ; and we need to recall certain essential modifications which have taken place in society during the last fifty years, in order not to be deceived by the too great analogy and resemblance.

But if society has changed and improved in some of its real conditions, the character of the nation has not changed, and this character was perfectly known and described by Mallet du Pan, who, in his capacity as a stranger, was more sensible than another to the heedlessness, the want of foresight and the inconsistency of the French. Malouet wrote to him in 1791 : ' We who reason correctly hardly ever hit upon any event with precision, because the actions of men have very little in common with good reasonings.' That is true for all nations and all men ; but it is still more true in France, for the French nature sums up in itself with more rapidity and contrast the faults and perhaps also the virtues of the species.

Mallet du Pan belonged to that group of Constitutionalists whose leaders in the Constituent Assembly, Mounier, Malouet, Lally, desired in 1789 something impossible but infinitely honourable, a right balance of monarchy and liberty ; we may say that Louis XVI, in so far as he had any ideas and wishes of his own, was of the same shade. It was this group which triumphed in 1814 when Louis XVIII gave the Charter, and which did not lose hope as long as the monarch was able to keep his ground.

During the first years of the Restoration, we think we can distinctly see the place that Mallet du Pan would have held between MM. de Serre, Camille Jordan and Royer-Collard. A man of observation however and above all of good sense, absolutely strange by his origins as well as by his habits of mind to the doctrines of divine right, it is evident to those who read him that, if he had lived, he would not by any means have been considered as wedded to the Restoration, and that he would have done more than consent to Louis-Philippe's attempt at Constitutional monarchy : he would have thought for a moment that he saw in it the tardy realisation of what he had long desired and so often despaired of, the establishment of a mixed government, at last become possible in France after those thirty or forty years of a dearly bought *preliminary education*. But how far would Mallet's confidence have gone, if his career had extended so far, and he had lived to the age of a Barbé-Marbois ? Would he have thought the harbour was ever reached ? Would he have had any faith in a stability which depended on so many combined efforts and such uncertain wisdom ? There is no doubt that if he, the strict and upright observer, who excelled in probing, analysing and describing a political situation, and in seeking the roots of things far below the surface, had lived till then and had preserved to the last his vigour of thought, he would more than once have knitted his brows and shaken his head at the speeches of the men who congratulated themselves in his presence on having for ever won, and on being in full and sure possession of the long desired government.

Behind the satisfied bourgeoisie he would still have perceived the grave and perpetual general symptoms which he had been the first to denounce in these terms in 1791 : after speaking of the first great invasion of the Roman Empire by the Barbarians, he said : ' In the picture of this memorable subversion we discover the image of that by which Europe is threatened. The Huns and the Heruli, the Vandals and the Goths will come neither from the North nor from the Black Sea, *they are in the midst of us.*' For it was Mallet du Pan who first gave utterance to these words, which have been so often re-echoed by others. He who thought thus at the opening of the Revolution, was not the man to go to sleep in our

country on the pillow of any Constitutional monarchy ; he needed to be assured that it was not being undermined.

We will continue to follow his footsteps outside of France, only remarking, for the moral explanation of his conduct, that Mallet du Pan was not a Frenchman. He had resided in France for eight years, working for the *Mercure* by virtue of an agreement concluded with the publisher Panckoucke ; in that paper he had honestly defended what he believed to be the good principles ; as a result of the esteem he had gained, he was charged, at the moment of his departure, with a mission by Louis XVI, ' who honoured me with his confidence, he says, without ever honouring me with his benefits.' This mission fulfilled, Mallet du Pan was free ; he could give his counsels to whom he pleased, without failing in any duty, either patriotic or honourable. Considering himself as a mere member of the great European society which was in danger, he was more free than Jomini himself could be when he carried elsewhere his skill in military science and tactics, for he, Mallet, had never been properly speaking in the service of France.

Having said so much in order to leave no doubt in the mind of the reader, let us continue to follow Mallet outside of France and in his rôle as an observer and excellent informant.

No man has more ably seized and noted the different stages and stopping-places of the Revolution than Mallet du Pan : at Paris in the *Mercure*, and at Brussels in his brochure published in 1793, he did not cease to study and characterise it in its progressive invasion and in its growing period : after the 9 Thermidor and since Robespierre's fall, he follows it step by step in the period of its wane, exactly like a learned physician who follows and distinguishes all the phases of a malady.

Robespierre being dead and the Convention, as well as the whole of France, delivered from an unexampled terror, the character of the Revolution changed in an instant ; Mallet does not hesitate to mark the new signs which indicate that it has just passed into quite a different phase. All the great actors who had hitherto played the leading parts having been either massacred or put to flight and depopularised, ' the Convention, he says,

and its parties find themselves destitute of men of talents and character, or of men possessing even a mediocre degree of administrative capacity. It is the valets who have seized their masters' sceptre after assassinating them.' That is indeed the character of the real Thermidorians ; and explaining the causes which make the formation of any great and new popularity impossible on that torn-up and blood-stained ground : ' All, he adds, have learned to distrust this perilous elevation : though they were tempted to aspire to it they would not attain it, for the roots of all individual authority are withered : neither the Assembly, warned by Robespierre's example, nor the people, disgusted with its demagogues, would suffer it. We may therefore regard the existence of the popular idols and of the charlatans in chief to be irrevocably at an end.' That is what happened in fact ; the era which opens with the 9 Thermidor is no longer that of great leaders, but of intriguers, the reign of the Barras.'

To understand the newspapers of the time, to be able to distinguish the true note under the inflated and resounding mask which the orators of the Convention still keep on after the 9 Thermidor, requires a key. Mallet du Pan warns the correspondents who consult him of this : ' Every sitting is a lie lasting several hours, with which they disguise their own intentions. The fear of being suspected of ideas contrary to those they profess makes them exaggerate the deception. The public papers which reproduce the debates of the Convention only tell the story of a masquerade.'

This Convention, thus decapitated and deprived of the leaders who were its terror and its strength, is not however to be despised ; Mallet du Pan is perfectly aware of it, and thinks in general that ' it is bad policy to despise one's enemy.'—' Individually, he says, the Convention is composed of pygmies ; but these pygmies, whenever they act in a body, have the strength of a Hercules,—the strength of a burning fever.'

As to the people, the public in France, the mass of the population, Mallet knows them well ; he neither exaggerates nor diminishes when he describes them, after the 9 Thermidor, as having only one desire and one passion, rest and peace, with or without a Monarchy, and rather without a Monarchy if possible :

' The latter (i.e. the Monarchy), he writes to the Abbé de Pradt on the 2 November 1794, has as yet only timid partisans. The mass is beginning to forget that there ever was a king, and once a peace has been concluded outside and a mild government established within, the people will have no more interest in desiring a different order of things. Those who aspire to it, being safe from dungeons and guillotines, will be satisfied with a poor inn, without going any further to reach a castle, where they might be much better lodged.'

So the great social body, which has felt itself so near total destruction, is feverishly longing for a cure, for any cure, even a mere patching : if that is offered, it will be content.

What strikes Mallet at the different periods of our Revolution, especially during the period that follows the Terror, and on the morrow of the fresh relapses (such as the 13 Vendémiaire, the 18 Fructidor), is the complete absence of public opinion and spirit, in the sense in which it is understood in free States :

' Public spirit properly speaking, he writes on the 28 January 1796, is a spirit of resignation and obedience ; every one tries to escape, cost what it may, that is to say by a thousand mean and infamous tricks, from the general distress. Since the 13 Vendémiaire (the day of the victory of the Convention with the help of Bonaparte's guns), the discouragement is general ; which does not prevent the fine world from going to the Comédie, passing over pavements still red with the blood of their kins-people or neighbours killed by Barras' grape-shot. Nobody can speak of the King at Paris without being laughed at to his face. The powers enjoy about the same amount of consideration : no doubt is felt that they will soon be thrown head over heels in the Rhine district.'

This Genevan knew his Parisian well, and his ease in escaping from any danger that is not present, that is not inside the barrier.

He says again and again in every kind of form to his correspondents of all ranks, to Louis XVIII himself and to the Comte d'Artois or to his friends, that they must not exaggerate the chances of a Royalist movement in France. He wrote to the Comte de Sainte-Aldegonde on the 27 March 1796 (M. de Sainte-Aldegonde was the creature of the Comte d'Artois) :

' All opinions divide themselves into endless branches ; but the first who is able to make himself king and to promise an early state of tranquillity will absorb them all.'

' Familiarity with misfortune and privations, the frightful state in which the Parisians lived under Robespierre, makes their present situation supportable. The peace, in whatever way given (*comme qu'elle fut*

donnée: it is a Genevan locution, but the idea is good), would overwhelm the nation with joy. Lassitude is at its height, no one thinks of anything but spending the rest of his days in peace. Whether Carnot or the Duke of Orleans, whether Louis XVIII or an Infant of Spain is king, provided that they govern tolerably, the public will be satisfied. They think of themselves, and then of themselves, and ever of themselves.'

There are however two points of exception to this almost universal egotism, and Mallet notices them, as it is right that we should notice them too: Firstly, the people, those he calls the lower class (but it extends much further), are still, in his opinion, infected by their hydrophobia, and are by no means cured of it: 'They are still like a mad animal, he says, in spite of their profound misery.' This rabies which survives even suffering and misery, is *the thirst for equality* and the hatred of the tyrant. And Mallet insists in more than one passage on this fanaticism for equality which forms the background of what he calls the revolutionary religion. Secondly, he is no less obliged to acknowledge, as a point of exception to this egotism of the mass of the people, the feeling of military devotion: the soldier, the officer may have their own thoughts in reserve, 'but differences of opinions and motives entail no difference in the manner of fighting: one spirit, one common sentiment animates all the soldiers. None wishes to appear to be vanquished by foreigners, none loves these foreigners.' It is enough for the soldier to find himself opposed to Royalist armies, to make him lose all inclination to be a Royalist himself. In my opinion Mallet does not call this disposition of the French soldier to forget his individuality under the banner by its right name, when he attributes it above all to vanity; we must call this vanity by its real social name, which is honour. But if, in the coolness and the good sense of his Genevan nature and his Protestant race he is far from being in sympathy with these both popular and military dispositions of the French genius, which have often burst out into heroism, we cannot accuse him of having disregarded them.

It redounds to his own honour that never, even in the bitterest and most desperate moments, did he yield a point of the conditions which he judged essential to the re-establishment of the Monarchy in France: 'It is as impossible to remake the *ancien régime*, he thought,

as to build St. Peter's at Rome with the dust of the roads.' Consulted by Louis XVIII from Verona, 'and by the Comte d'Artois from Edinburgh, in their eccentric plans of Restoration, he never ceases repeating to them: 'One must listen to the interior if one wishes to undertake anything solid. . . . It is not for us to direct the interior, on the contrary it ought to direct us.'

In a Note written for Louis XVIII in July 1795, Mallet du Pan puts the real terms of the question, which that King appeared not entirely to understand at the time, and which it needed a longer adversity to make plain and demonstrate to him. 'The great majority of Frenchmen having participated in the Revolution through errors of conduct or errors of opinion, wrote Mallet, it is only too true that they will never surrender at discretion to the old authority and its guardians; it is enough to look down into the human heart to convince oneself of this truth.' He added that a part of the principles of the day having resisted the horrors of the Revolution, 'the present generation, infected by this leaven, could only cast it off in the course of time and under a firm and enlightened government.' He successively analysed the spirit of the towns in general, that of the citizens of all classes, the spirit of the country districts, where the peasant, having become a land-owner by acquiring the property of the Émigrés, very readily put up with the new régime and feared nothing so much as a return to the old one. It was not by a *coup de main*, though it were successful, that so many interests and sentiments of a new kind and of recent formation could be faced and satisfied: '*Coups de main* are pernicious as long as one has not looked beyond them and made provision for their morrow'; and a partial success would not injure the Republic, 'unless at the same time and before everything we made a striking impression on minds and interests, by seizing the point of conciliation to which we could hope to bring the wills and efforts of men.' Such was Mallet du Pan's doctrine, and Louis XVIII was not at that time ripe for understanding it.

The name of the Duke of Orleans (afterwards Louis-Philippe) recurs from time to time in this Correspondence, and Mallet always speaks of that young prince with remarkable esteem, with a singular foresight. Having

met him in London at the beginning of 1800, he wrote about him to the Comte de Sainte-Aldegonde : ' I cannot describe to you what an immense success the Prince has had here, both with the English and with all sensible Frenchmen. It would be difficult to meet with a man with a better balanced, more developed and more enlightened mind, a man who speaks better, displays more sense and knowledge, a simpler and more attractive politeness. *Oh ! that man has succeeded in turning adversity to account. . . .*' I did not go too far then when I said that Mallet du Pan, if he had lived till 1830, would not have failed to acquiesce in Louis-Philippe's attempt at a Constitutional monarchy ; and with his uncommon power of prognostication he wrote, as early as the 20 February 1796, in a letter referring to this same Duke of Orleans :

' If, by a conduct that is compatible with the persons, the prejudices and interests of the time, and with the imperious force of circumstances, the King (Louis XVIII) does not return and attach to himself or his branch that multitude of old and new Revolutionaries who are half royalised or on the way to becoming royalised, you will see them choose the first king that comes to terms with them. I protest to you that, if there were a foreign prince sufficiently wealthy, sufficiently clever, sufficiently audacious, you would see a revolution in France like that of 1688 in England. This change of dynasty is, more or less, the object in view of all who count and are bestirring themselves at this moment.'

It is curious to see the inclination of 1796 become, through the fatal course of events, the necessity of 1830.

And Mallet du Pan says more explicitly still, even mentioning the Duke's name in full (27 March 1796) :

' The Duke of Orleans has many partisans. If we do not take care, he will easily unite the great mass of people who had anything to do with the Revolution, those who made their fortunes by it, the whole class of four hundred thousand individuals who bought, resold, or are still owners of national estates.'

One could not be more clairvoyant than that at thirty-four years distance.

Mallet du Pan's independence in the counsels he gives to the Princes of the house of Bourbon is therefore manifest : it is no less evident in his attitude and his conduct with regard to the foreign Ministers who consult him. It appears that when he talked with them personally, and even with Archdukes, he had a certain way of expressing his opinion with warmth, and of emphasising

it by stamping his foot which must have astonished these great Court personages : but they only esteemed him the more. Do not imagine that Mallet du Pan was an ordinary consulting lawyer, who was satisfied with conscientiously giving his opinion, and then felt that he had done his duty : by no means ! his conviction, all his morality and his personality even were involved in the counsels he gave, and he expected that if they were not carried out to the letter, his consulters should at least not act in a directly contrary sense. Herr von Hardenberg, the Prussian Minister, having persisted in consulting him, whilst at the same time taking part in the negotiations for the peace of Bâle to which Mallet was directly opposed, the latter took it very ill ; he interrupted a labour that had become *derisory* in this new conjecture : ' In this state of things, he wrote to von Hardenberg, every letter on my part became an act of importunity, a nonsensical impropriety.'

In 1794, being involved, with great reluctance, in a plan of Conciliation which the Constitutionalists of the shade of the Lameths offered to the emigrant Princes, Mallet du Pan heard that it was being talked about in Condé's army, and received from the English Envoy in Switzerland, Mr. Wickham, a communication on the subject. One should read the whole of his letter in reply to this Envoy, who did not take it in bad part ; it was altogether intended for those incurable and intolerant Emigrés :

' Nothing moreover, said Mallet at the end, is more indifferent to me than this old woman's gossip. The only thing that vexes me is that it should be listened to, and that it injures the cause of those who so heedlessly lend ear to it ; *there is not a single Revolutionary who would not remain a Revolutionary, if he heard how shamefully those are treated who most steadfastly and courageously defended the interests of the house of Bourbon.*

' You are at liberty, Sir, to communicate my sentiments to the Prince de Condé and to whomever you please. So much the worse for those who blame my opinions on the circumstances, I do not trouble myself about it in the least : *Stultorum magister est eventus.* These Gentlemen may set their minds at rest to-day with regard to the quality of the Monarchy that will be established in France, for they will have no Monarchy at all. *Your last Stuarts talked and behaved as the Emigrants are talking and behaving, and they will end like them.*'

A few months later, he wrote to M. de Sainte-Aldegonde on the subject of the general peace which was considered

to be quite imminent, and betrayed his secret thought on this universal state of confusion, when each State was making its own peace and pulling its own way :

' All these European bickerings no longer mean anything to us. Whether they acknowledge the King or not does not matter six farthings : it is France, and not the beaten, scorned, hated foreigners, that must adopt him. If he thinks otherwise, he will end, like the King of Sidon, by being a gardener.'

From the mere tone, it is evident that with this fund of Republican temper and this consciousness of being a free man, which comes to the surface as soon as it is exasperated, Mallet du Pan resigns himself to the worst he is out of patience at the sight of so many mistakes so many acts of folly, so badly played a game of chess. ' It is a signal good fortune, he exclaims, to be independent in such desperate conjunctures, in the midst of men whose conduct would ruin the most favourable of conjunctures.'

We see now, without any reason for doubt, that Mallet du Pan, that *peasant of the Danube* of the Emigrés, with his candid nature was particularly fitted to be a consulting lawyer and Royalist adviser. During the Revolution were seen equally sagacious and able observers, but in conditions and under inspirations totally different. Mirabeau, for example, had at his side a man of true merit, Pellenc, of whom he made great use, and who, after his death, passed into the service of Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, then of Mr Pitt, then of the Chancery of Vienna, to return in the end to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France, where he was one of the most widely employed and useful workers. For those who knew M. Pellenc I may define Mallet du Pan as an energetic Pellenc, of a superior stamp, who is not afraid, who, when consulted by the Cabinets says what he thinks, but who prefers to say it to all, to the public, giving vent to his thoughts, his views, his honest and sensible indignation, failing which he is condemned to what he himself called *the torment of silence*.

Can it be believed that, carried away by his conviction, by his courage, on the morrow of the Terror, in the spring of 1795, obliged by nothing whatever but his ardent pen and his need to enter the fire, Mallet du Pan was on the point of returning to Paris ? ' Would you believe, he wrote at this time to the Abbé de Pradt, that I am being

urged every week to return to Paris? And would you believe that another turn of the wheel and I shall go?' On that day he was very near yielding to French impetuosity. He burned to come and take his share in this combat of opinions, in which the Abbé Morellet and so many brave journalists, such as Lacretelle, old Constitutionalists, men of '89 rallied to the Royalists and forming a body against the Convention, distinguished themselves. Mallet cannot forgive the emigrant Princes for not understanding that spontaneous movement of the Paris Sections, for not favouring it with all their power by consenting to the fusion of the Constitutionalists: 'With a million crowns, with a million francs, he wrote to Comte de Sainte-Aldegonde (23 September 1795), the victory of the Sections might have been decided with a high hand. I have received reiterated entreaties from Paris on that subject. But what can I do? I have solicited, I have reproved Ministers, great lords: not a farthing. They will waste milliards in being beaten, but not a crown to save themselves. I could tell you some execrable things on this subject, *all my blood rises up at them.*' The cannons of Vendémiaire fired by Bonaparte would, in every case perhaps, have put an end to these hopes. Little incidents, such as encountering a Bonaparte, are among those unforeseen things that complicate the natural progress of revolutions.

Be this as it may, after Thermidor and before the guns of Vendémiaire, before the raid of Quiberon, Mallet du Pan had had a violent fit of hope; he had felt with his tactician's glance, that now or never was the time for acting, and that with a hearty charge they might rout the hostile army, that is to say the Convention. Since that moment a like chance did not again present itself to his eyes, and, even on the eve of the 18 Fructidor, he had only a very doubtful and very fugitive return of hope.

The truth is that at this time he had nothing more to learn about the emigrant Princes and their incurable chimeras, and that he had a secret feeling that the near solution, even though it produced a king and a master, would not lie in their direction.

Mallet was already in this very unhopeful disposition when he published at Hamburg, in 1796, a few months after the events of the 13 Vendémiaire, his brochure entitled

Correspondance politique pour servir à l'Histoire du Républicanisme français. The remarkable part of this pamphlet is the Foreword and the Introduction, in which Mallet resumes that picture he has so often traced of the Revolution and engraves it with the lines of a Juvenal. In his pamphlet published at Brussels in 1793, we saw him address himself to the heads of the Cabinets and the French Princes rather than to France itself : here, it is the contrary ; he despairs of the foreigner, and he writes for France, for those within the country whom it is necessary to bring back to reason. His aim is to say what a number of sensible people in Paris neither can nor dare say. And then, though his words were futile, he cannot keep them back : ' I am going to reap, he wrote, a harvest of malcontents. I have written as I should write twenty years hence. There remains no other good but independence, *I must make use of it for my own relief.*'

I will not analyse the Foreword and the Introduction, which would deserve to be read in full. It would seem to be Mallet's object to prove that true liberty is only found in a moderate Monarchy, and that a Republic implies slavery. He is anxious to reassure in the first place those inside who may imagine, according to the declamations of the extremists, that Monarchy necessarily brings with it the oppression of thought and the prohibition of reasoning :

' There has been formed in Europe, he says, a league of fools and fanatics who, if they could, would forbid man the power of seeing and thinking. The sight of a book gives them a shudder : because the light of knowledge has been abused, they would exterminate all whom they suppose to be enlightened ; because wicked and blind men have made liberty horrible, they would govern the world with sabres and cudgels. Convinced that, but for the men of intellect, there would never have been a revolution, they hope to overthrow it with imbeciles. They regard all incentives as good, except talents. The poor men do not perceive that it is the passions rather than knowledge that turn the world upside down, and that if intellect has been harmful, it requires still more intellect than the wicked have to restrain and vanquish them.'

All that is very intelligent and clever at the same time, and is a return to Mallet's habitual line of thought. Little as he belongs to the school of Jean-Jacques and the *Contrat social*, he loves to proclaim himself of the school of Montesquieu. ' If I could bring it to pass, said Montesquieu, that all the world had fresh reasons for loving its

duties, its princes, its country, its laws : that they could be more sensible of their good fortune in every country, in every government, in every position in which they happen to be, I should consider myself the happiest of mortals.' Now, the impression produced by Rousseau in politics is quite the contrary : after reading him, everybody must necessarily be more discontented with his condition. That epidemic of political Constitutions, 'which at that time succeeded, in France and in Europe, the jumping-jack and the air-balloon' (two novelties of the day), dates from him :

'Not a merchant's clerk nourished on the *Histoire*, says Mallet du Pan, not a schoolmaster who has translated ten pages of Livy, not an artist who has perused Rollin, not a bel-esprit who has become a publicist from learning by heart the logographs of the *Contrat social*, but wants to create a Constitution nowadays. . . .

'Meanwhile society is crumbling to pieces during the search for this philosopher's stone of speculative politics ; it remains in the state of ashes at the bottom of the crucible. As nothing is easier than to *perfect the imaginary*, all the busybodies are worrying their brains over this ideal world. That is one of the principal causes of the successes gained by Gallican novelties. They disregard all the well-known systems of liberty ; they intoxicate the imaginations of fools, at the same time that they kindle the popular passions. One begins with curiosity and ends with enthusiasm. The vulgar hasten to carry out this experiment as a miser hastens to a magical operation that promises him treasures, and, in this puerile fascination, everyone expects in the end to find something that has never been seen before, even under the freest of governments, *unchangeable perfection, universal brotherhood, the power of acquiring everything that we lack and of composing an existence that is all enjoyment.*'

It will be admitted that no man knew better and described in plainer words the social malady of his time than Mallet du Pan, and we could imagine in places that he was only describing that of our own time, that of this morning : the truth is that, saving a few very slight superficial variations, it is the same malady that, fifty years later, is still tormenting us and seeking its outlet ; it will long seek it. These great moral epidemics through which societies pass, and which transform them, which do not leave them after the same that they were before, wear down many generations and constitute the real epochs of history.¹

¹ They are *growing pains*, say the partisans of the progressive perfectibility and education of the human race. This poor humanity is a troublesome child that costs a terrible lot to rear ! The fact is that, by aiming even at impossible things, society in the long run obtains possible things that it would never otherwise have attained.

Like the few serious and conscientious physicians, Mallet du Pan is bolder in diagnosing and describing the malady than in proposing a remedy. Of the future, he knows little, and he never says more about it than he knows. It is very foolhardy, he thinks, to propose conjectures : 'Conjectures are pure waste, and predictions are follies.' Contemporaries however desire solutions at any price, and complain that they do not get them. That is what he was reproached with at the time in respect of this pamphlet of 1796 : 'It is natural for the unfortunate, somebody said, to believe that the man who is so well able to explain the causes of their misery should also know the means of relieving them : his book, on the other hand, deprives them of hope, he assigns no term to the Revolution, and they are more unhappy after reading him than before.' And indeed, the only remedy indicated by Mallet du Pan, that distant remedy of Constitutional Monarchy, is presented by him in terms which show clearly how uncertain he felt it to be in its application to France :

'If ever, he said, a Legislator rescues France from the oppression of her lawyers and brings her back to a government, i can only be by simple legislation adapted to primitive relations. His skill and good fortune will be crowned if he only succeeds in harmonising old and new prejudices, the interests which preceded and those which followed the Revolution : *a fragile but desirable alliance of Monarchical authority and liberty, against which the memories, either of an all-powerful Royalty or of Revolutionary independence, will incessantly struggle. . . .*'

He felt how ill-adapted was the French genius, always in extremes and composed of carelessness and impatience, to this continual struggle, to this balance which demands consistency, vigilance and moderation even in the conflict.

Elsewhere he uttered a terrible word, which might be taken as a severe judgment of the French. Explaining in his *Mercure britannique*, a few months before his death, in January of the year 1800, the character of the great commotion which would continue to weigh on the new century and which opened another epoch in the history of human vicissitudes, he pointed out like a true philosopher that the character of this Revolution was based before everything on the destruction of all pre-existing hereditary distinctions, that it was in reality

a war against all inequalities created by the old social order, a question of *equality* in a word : ' It is on this conflict, he added, *infinitely more than on liberty, which is for ever unintelligible to the French*, that the Revolution is founded and will repose to the last.' Let us hope that, even whilst caring less for liberty than we should (which is too evident), we shall however understand it sufficiently to belie so absolute and so severe a prognostic.

I will not abuse. Those who read these *Mémoirs* of Mallet du Pan will find in them numerous letters describing in intimacy, and each with his proper tone, the Abbé de Pradt, Montlosier, Mounier, Lally, Portalis. A great variety of persons pass before us who talk familiarly and unconsciously depict themselves. Mallet's residence in Germany was fertile in relations and meetings. When Geneva was annexed to France (April 1798), three Genevans were, by the Treaty of Union, declared for ever deprived and excluded from the honour of belonging to the French nation, and at the head of them was named Mallet du Pan. There remained no other course open to him, if he wished still to speak to the public, than to leave the Continent, for there was no place in it where he could safely print a line against the Directoire : ' I have only been tolerated here, he wrote from Freiburg-in-Breisgau to the Abbé de Pradt, on giving a promise to preserve silence. What can you expect me then to do in Germany ? . . . Your Continent is a horror to me with its slaves and executioners, its baseness and cowardice ; England is the only country where a man can write, speak, think and act : there is my place, there is no other for one who desires to continue the war.'

He departed therefore, and landed in England on the 1 May 1798 ; there he felt himself instantly on firm ground, where a powerful public spirit reigned. There he immediately erected his fighting battery, his *Mercure britannique*, a publication intended for combating steadily, by means of descriptions mingled with discussions, the policy of the Directoire : ' Experience is wasted, said Mallet, if it is not engraved at the very moment in writings which fix the impression.' The declared passion and the fixed purpose of this attack did not in this *Mercure* preclude the sagacity and, to a certain extent, the impartiality of his criticisms. Everything that Mallet says about those

men whom he treats as enemies, the Sieyès', the Carnots, is worthy of being taken into consideration. He at once appreciates the greatness of Bonaparte's rôle, and proclaims the fact of the 18 Brumaire as the beginning of an unknown transformation : 'Let us await the harvest, he says, to judge the seed.' He only had time to embrace with a glance his new battle horizon. He died at his work, as I have said, in the spring of 1800, and the pen fell from his hand through weakness, as does the sword from the most valiant.

To-day, thanks to Mallet's *Mémoirs*, one may, without having recourse to voluminous publications that are difficult to collect, see before one the series of his essential observations, his opinions and his *descriptions* concerning the great historic period in which he was one of the combatants, but above all the assiduous and passionate annotator. It is, in my opinion, a book that will live like those of the best consulting physicians in social crises.¹

¹ The curious will find in the fifteenth volume of the *Spectateur du Nord* some articles on Mallet du Pan, which very accurately sum up the opinions of his enlightened contemporaries, at the time of his death : they promise his memory the slow and sure justice which has now been done him.

MARMONTEL

Monday, 15 September 1851.

NOTHING is more painful to me than to see the disdain with which commendable and distinguished writers of the second rank are often treated, as if there were no room except for those of the first. What we should do in the case of those writers who were so highly esteemed in their day and are now antiquated, is to reconsider their claims and to cut off their dead part, taking away only that which deserves to survive. Posterity appears to me more and more like a hurried traveller who is packing his trunk, and cannot find room for more than a small number of chosen volumes. Critic, you who have the honour of being for the posterity of the moment a nomenclator, a secretary, and, if possible, a confidential librarian, tell him quickly the titles of those volumes which deserve to be remembered and read ; hasten, the train is getting ready to start, the engine is getting up steam, the smoke is rising, our traveller has but a moment. You have mentioned Marmontel : but what work of Marmontel do you recommend ? I do not hesitate, and I say : The *Memoirs*, nothing but the *Memoirs*. But, in saying this, I insist that at every new departure they shall never be forgotten.

Marmontel stands in the first rank among the good littérateurs of the eighteenth century ; senior to La Harpe by fifteen or sixteen years, he deserves as much, and more than La Harpe, to be called Voltaire's first pupil in all branches. He was talented and hard working, flexible, easy, active, abundant, much too satisfied with the approximate in the order of poetry and art, introducing false notes, but full of resources and ideas, and employing elegant and precise expression in all that was merely literary labour ; moreover an excellent story-teller, not so much in his *Tales* proper as in the telling of those

anecdotes which come under his pen in his *Memoirs*: an excellent painter of society portraits, knowing and reproducing with wonderful skill the world of his time, with an optimistic colouring which does not exclude shrewdness and does not mar the resemblance. In short Marmontel, with his weaknesses and a character which was neither strongly tempered nor very elevated, was an honest man, what we call a good nature, unspoiled by the life of the century, the easy morals and the literary coteries into which he had drifted more than any other. He had acquired neither the bitterness of some, nor the glaring arrogance of others; in spite of some petulance and even irascibility, he cherished no evil passion. His conduct at the epoch of the Revolution, and in the difficult circumstances in which so many others of his colleagues (and La Harpe in the first place) covered themselves with ridicule and disgrace, was dignified, prudent, even generous. So, when it became known that this good old Marmontel had just died in the cottage to which he had retired, in the hamlet of Abloville near Gaillon in Normandy, on the 31 December 1799, the last day of the century, this death aroused everywhere a feeling of esteem and regret.

It was in this last retreat that he wrote his most pleasing and most enduring work, his *Memoirs*: 'It is for my children that I write the story of my life,' he says at the beginning; 'their mother wished it.' There are many things in it that we are surprised that he should have written for his children and at his wife's solicitation; but this only illustrates another characteristic feature of the morals of the time, and the general tone of bonhomie and naturalness which prevails in the whole work is its passport.

Marmontel was between seventy-six and seventy-seven years of age when he died, having been born on the 11 July 1723 at Bort in Lanoussin. This pretty little town of Bort, lying in a valley, is commanded by some symmetrically disposed volcanic rocks, which, when the wind blows, give out a strange, harmonious sound, and which for that reason have been called the *organ of Bort*. Marmontel describes with expansiveness and freshness the pleasant cradle of his childhood. In the first pages, when picturing his modest, united and happy

family (he was, I think, the son of a tailor), the good priest who teaches him Latin, the Abbé Vaissière ; the first comrade and friend of his heart whom he takes for his model, the wise Durant ; when introducing us to his mother, charming and mentally distinguished in her obscure condition, to his father with his good sense and severer tenderness, to his aunts and sisters, we seem to breathe an odour of good morals and good sentiments which will cling to him, and which he will never lose, even in the boudoirs where afterwards he forgets his origin. We see the first beginnings of a quick, facile, rather richly endowed and very malleable nature, a very *natural* nature, if I may say so, open, frank, rather proud without conceit, without any gall and without any bad leaven. I know of no prettier picture of home life than that which he draws of this patriarchal family and its fire-side joys :

'Add to the household three sisters of my grandmother, and my mother's sister, that surviving aunt ; in the midst of these women and a crowd of children, my father was the only man ; all this family had very little to live on. Order, economy, labour, a little trading, and above all frugality, kept us in a state of comfort. The little garden produced almost enough vegetables for the needs of the house ; the close gave us fruit, and our quinces, our apples, our pears, preserved in the honey of our bees, afforded us children and the good old ladies the most exquisite breakfasts in the winter. The herd of the sheepfold of St. Thomas clothed with its wool now the women and now the children ; my aunts would spin it ; they spun also the hemp of the field which provided us with linen ; and the evening gatherings of young people of the neighbourhood who came to help us to strip this fine hemp, by the light of the lamp fed with the oil of our walnut trees, presented a charming picture. The grain-crops of our little farm assured us a living : the wax and the honey of our bees, which one of my aunts reared with care, were a source of profit and little expense ; the oil pressed out of our fresh walnuts had a flavour and a perfume that we preferred to that of the olive. Our buckwheat cakes (called *tourtons* in the language of the country), soaked, burning hot, in that good butter of the Mont-Dor, were to us the daintiest of treats. No dish that I know of could have pleased us better than our turnips and our chestnuts ; and on winter evenings, when these beautiful turnips were grilling around the hearth, or when we heard the simmering of the pot in which these sweet and savoury chestnuts were cooking, our hearts leaped with joy. I can also remember the scent proceeding from a fine quince that was roasting under the ashes, and the pleasure which our grandmother took in dividing it among us. *The soberest of women made gourmands of us all.*'

This last touch is truer of Marmontel than he appears to believe when he tells us of it with a smile. It is remarkable how in his narrative, whatever its nature may be, he never forgets the details of the table, the champagne

or the flask of Tokay which enlivened the end of the most witty repast. If the suppers at M. de La Popelinière's at Passy or at the head clerks' at Versailles appeared to him *ample*, he does not forget that that was not so with Mme Geoffrin's more delicate suppers, and that their good cheer was *succinct*. He remembers even the menu of his first dinner in the Bastille, and his ordinary which, thanks to the Governor, was as copious as it was succulent ; and Vaucluse still commended itself thirty years afterwards to his memory by the after-taste of the fine crayfish and the excellent trout he had eaten there, no less than by the platonic reminiscences of Petrarch. It is true that at his rising in the morning, during his happy visits to the country, Marmontel is equally ready to appreciate an *ample bowl of frothy milk*. The only inference I wish to draw from these details which on every occasion season the pleasing parts of Marmontel's *Mémoirs*, is that he was naturally a little sensual and that he shows it, without any prejudice however to the interest of his narrative, so that the reader will say to himself as he follows his story : ' The good man sometimes embellishes the past with too easy colours, but after all he exhibits himself with naïveté and in his true nature, he does not lie.'

Little is wanting in these first books of Marmontel's *Mémoirs* to make them masterpieces of narrative and of familiar and domestic painting. Unfortunately a few false touches of the brush too often cross the simple tones and spoil the impression. Speaking of the father of his good comrade Durant, a field-labourer in a neighbouring village, who welcomed him with pleasure on the days when the two friends went out walking together : ' How he entertained us, that good white-haired old man ! he exclaims ; the good cream, the good milk, the good black bread that he gave us ! and what happy omens he was pleased to see in my respect for his old age ! Why cannot I go and sow flowers on his grave ! ' Do you feel how this latter touch, which is quite academic, quite literary, and an imitation of Gessner's unreal style, spoils the preceding picture ? It is a relapse into the style of the *Moral Tales*. Marmontel has not that severe good taste which warns us to stop in time and to keep to nature. It was on the other hand the glory of Jean-Jacques' brush

in his *Confessions*, that he expressed nothing that was not true and really felt, and that he remained firm and sober even in the splendours of his description and in his tenderness.

Nothing is more pleasing however than these first pages of Marmontel. He continues his studies at the Jesuits' College at Mauriac ; he describes his masters, his school-fellows ; he makes us feel and sympathise with his privations, his schoolboy's joy, his triumphs. He lived with four or five comrades at the house of an artisan in the town ; each had with him his store of provisions for the week, the supplies sent from the paternal roof : ' Our *bourgeoise* cooked for us, and for her trouble, her fire, her lamp, her beds, her lodging, and even the vegetables of her little garden that she put into the pot, we paid her each twenty-five sous a month ; so that, everything included, except my clothing, I might have cost my father four or five louis a year. That was much for him.' On fête-days one of the more favoured of the scholars would receive some dainty morsel ; on those days the feast was shared in common, and by a delicate attention, in order not to grieve the poorer ones, the boy who had been favoured by the reception of the dainties was not mentioned : ' When one of these presents arrived, the *bourgeoise* announced it to us : but she was forbidden to say who had received it, and the recipient himself would have been ashamed of boasting of it. This discretion excited my mother's admiration, when I told her of it.' One sees the tone and the strong family feeling animating all these first pages. Marmontel had a brilliant school career, and was almost always the first in his class : ' My good mother was delighted. When my dimity vests were sent back to her, she would quickly look to see if the silver chain that held the cross had blackened my button-hole ; and, when she saw this mark of my triumph, all the mothers in the neighbourhood were told of her joy ; our good nuns gave thanks to Heaven ; my dear Abbé Vaissière beamed with pride.' We see here the true signs of a tender and pious filial feeling, a native honesty that we never find in Rousseau, who was in many respects so superior. However the future littérateur, soon to be the friend of the philosophers, already announced himself by a few acts of boldness and a few weaknesses. In the

third class, Marmontel, as head boy, became the censor and superintendent of his class-fellows, and determined to gain their favour and aspire to popularity : ' I made it a rule, he says, to mitigate the censure ; and, in the absence of the master, during the half-hour when I was alone in charge, I began by allowing a reasonable amount of liberty : they talked, laughed, amused themselves quietly, and my report said nothing about it. This indulgence which made me liked became every day more relaxed. Liberty was succeeded by licence, and I suffered it ; I did more, I encouraged it, so attractive was the public favour to me ! ' In short, it ended in his permitting one of his class-mates, who was reputed the best dancer of the *bourette* in Auvergne, to dance it in the middle of the class-room. One should read in the work itself about the series of tribulations which followed this piece of factious complaisance.

One day in the Rhetoric class he was unjustly threatened with a flogging. But, just or not, what did it matter ? to flog a Rhetorician, that was the enormity, the infamy. Marmontel, escaping from the room of the odious prefect of studies, rushes back to the class-room ; he harangues his comrades, he embraces the altar ; one should read the speech, a happy parody of those which Livy's Romans delivered on withdrawing to Mount Aventinus. With his peroration he carries away the whole Rhetoric class, who, having only a month more of school before the vacation, take upon themselves to cut it short and announce the school year to be closed a month sooner, and to withdraw in a body and in good order with the honours of the war. The furious prefect, not daring to attack the sacred battalion, contented himself with regarding Marmontel with a threatening eye : ' He predicted that I should be the leader of a faction. He knew me ill : so his prediction was not fulfilled,' adds the excellent man who, wiser and matured by experience, desired no popularity in '89.

It will be remarked that in his *Mémoirs* Marmontel is rather fond of quoting his speeches, of recalling those he made in certain circumstances, and recomposing them ; but he is not always equally successful : to be that he has to bring in, as in the just mentioned case, a touch of parody and humour. When he takes himself quite

seriously and openly aims at being pathetic, he fails. Thus, when in January 1760, on leaving the Bastille, where he had been detained eleven days for reciting in society a satire against the Duc d'Aumont, he calls upon the Minister, the Duc de Choiseul, and tries to move him, to obtain the continuation of the privilege to publish the *Mercure* with which he supports his family, his aunts, his sisters, the speech he supposes himself to have delivered on this occasion, and which he recomposes from memory, is artificial and almost ridiculous : ' Know, Monsieur le Duc, that at the age of sixteen, having lost my father, and seeing myself surrounded by orphans like myself and a poor and numerous family, I promised to be a father to them all. *I take Heaven and nature to witness.* . . . Ah ! it is there that the Duc d'Aumont will have to go to taste the fruits of his vengeance ; it is there that he will hear their cries and see their tears flow. Let him go there and count his victims and those he has made unfortunate ; let him go there and get his fill of tears, etc.' We have the amplification in its completeness, and an amplification which, this time, is not even excused by the smile of the author. Marmontel had felt himself eloquent at the moment of speaking to M. de Choiseul, and he thought he was again eloquent when giving from memory what he called a *slight sketch* of his former speech, whilst he was only giving a caricature. There is his mistake ; and it is because he has not a sufficiently sure taste for discerning these shades at the moment, that Marmontel is not a true artist, nor even a critic of the first rank. But this shall not be a reason for our denying him the abundant natural and pleasing qualities which he manifests at the same time.

As a rule, without falling as much as many of his contemporaries into the bad taste of the century, Marmontel shares in and does not resist it. He himself or the persons he brings on the stage are fond of speaking of nature ; their eyes are quick to become moist (' *I who weep easily,* he says), they rush effusively into each others' arms, they water their embraces with tears. Marmontel is rather fond of this kind of dramatic phraseology, even when he is only recounting scenes of real life. Somebody said rightly that if Marmontel, when he is good, leads to *Ducis*, when he is bad he approaches *Pouilly*.

The first book of his *Memoirs* is however very well composed. This happy book, which contains the story of his childhood, of his family, of his first schooling and even of his first love affairs, ends with the abrupt news of his father's death, that is to say with the first great grief that initiates him into the seriousness of life.

In the second, Marmontel, who has done his Philosophy course at Clermont-Ferrand and now wears the ecclesiastical habit, is thinking of taking the tonsure at Limoges. Having been tonsured, he seeks a career; he is almost induced to join the Jesuits at Toulouse, who had marked him and would have liked him to be one of themselves. During this uncertainty and these wavering plans of his youth, he travels about the country, and every Curé's niece he meets in his wanderings is compared with a Correggio Virgin. One of my friends who knows his Limousin thoroughly tells me that if the nieces of the Curés and the young girls of that province in general are fresh and pretty, they have anything but that Correggio-like appearance or that rose-coloured manner of speaking. Marmontel lends the same graces to the daughter of a muleteer at Aurillac who has offered him hospitality for a few days: he describes her arm as *kneaded with lilies*, 'and the little one sees of her neck is white as ivory.' This vein of sensuality does not go further than it should at that time in this honest nature; but I notice above all his habit of seeing things a little differently from what they are, of painting them with a certain indulgent and softened colouring which is not their right colour; I observe, in a word, that disposition of the author to *Marmontelise* nature.

However, whilst he is at Toulouse, Marmontel, whose activity and talent are seeking an outlet in all directions, competes for the Jeux Floraux; he fails to win the prize the first time, and, in his vexation, he writes to Voltaire and sends him his work; he appeals to him as the sovereign arbiter of poetry. Voltaire replies. Once in correspondence with the great man, we can understand Marmontel's taking a dislike to the priest's bands, to the ecclesiastical career, and starting on a certain day for Paris on the faith of a promise and a hope. He was twenty-two years of age.

He was to be placed, through Voltaire's patronage, with

M. Orri, Controller-General of Finances ; he arrives, but M. Orri has just been disgraced (December 1745) : our young friend is thrown back on his pen and his courage. Behold Marmontel then in the situation that we have all experienced, lodged in the Rue des Maçons-Sorbonne, and afterwards in the Petite Rue du Paon, frequenting the Café Procope, living on credit, looking for a publisher, composing a fine tragedy for the coming winter and meanwhile editing, with a friend, a little journal (*L'Observateur*). He had at this first start in life a piece of good fortune which influenced his whole life. At Voltaire's house he met Vauvenargues, who, already marked by death, had come to live in Paris : Marmontel lived opposite to him, waited on him, talked with him, gathered instruction from him, and in his heart, too mobile, too subject to surrounding influences, but fundamentally honest and upright, he treasured to the last and in spite of all the philters that bewildered him, a taste for that sound and pure philosophy which Vauvenargues' eloquence had poured into it.

Marmontel made his débüt with tragedies : would you believe it ? he had some successes. He appeared made for this branch of literature. Voltaire always regretted that he gave it up so soon. Collé, a severe critic, wrote in 1758 these words of which, by the way, he afterwards repented : 'I think he has a decided talent for tragedy.' Marmontel's two first tragedies, *Denys le Tyran*, played in February 1748, and *Aristomène*, played in April 1749, created a furore. The author was dragged in triumph on to the stage. He became the fashion from the first day ; the pompous financiers who piqued themselves on their good taste, like M. de La Popelinière, would not let him out of their drawing-rooms, and the women who piqued themselves on their love of fame, like Mlle Navarre, instantly desired him in their alcoves.

Who was this Mlle Navarre ? go to Marmontel and question this third book of his *Memoirs*, which is so to say his fourth book of the *Aeneid*, but in which there is more than one Dido. Mlle Navarre, daughter of M. Navarre, Receiver of the Tailles at Soissons, was, as we are told by a man who was not in love with her (Grosley), the most brilliant match of her family ; she aimed at something great, something extraordinary, and won

the love of the Maréchal de Saxe : 'Beauty, graces, talents, a delicate wit, a tender heart, called her to this brilliant conquest. . . . Her conversation was delightful.'¹ Marmontel shows her besides as fickle, capricious, with more brilliancy even than beauty ; 'Dressed as a Pole, in the most gallant manner, two long tresses floated over her shoulders ; and some *jonquils* on her head, mingling with her hair, marvellously heightened the brilliancy of that beautiful brunette complexion which was animated by the fire of two sparkling eyes.' It was this amazon, this beautiful warrior who, sacrificing the illustrious Marshal to the young poet, one morning carried Marmontel away from his Parisian societies and transported him with a touch of her wand to her solitude at Aveney, where she kept him imprisoned for several months among the vines of Champagne as on a Calypso's Island. The most unfortunate of happy lovers, Marmontel tells in a piquant manner of some of the insane extravagances with which she kept him perpetually amused in this *tête-à-tête* that she was especially afraid might become monotonous. Dropped as abruptly as he had been taken up, he then allows us to witness his troubles, his affliction and his consolation, which soon followed ; it came to him in the shape of the celebrated actress Mlle Clairon, who was of his own age and who contributed to the success of his plays.

Another distraction of Marmontel's at this time (for he had many) was for another young and pretty actress, Mlle Verrière, who had also belonged to the Maréchal de Saxe : she had had a daughter by him, since acknowledged, *Aurore de Saxe*, who is no other, I think, than the grandmother of Mme Sand. By treading so often in the Marshal's footsteps, Marmontel at last roused his anger : 'This insolent little poet is carrying off all my mistresses,' grumbled the illustrious warrior. *Aurore de Saxe* was within an ace of being immediately disowned, disinherited and *Marmontelised*.

These dissipations, those he found at Passy whither he had gone to reside with his Mæcenas M. de La Popelinière, this life of suppers and pleasures, arrested Marmontel's

¹ *Life of Grosley*, written by himself, continued and published by the Abbé Maydieu (1787) ; on pages 95-99 may be found some additional details concerning Mlle Navarre.

first successes and his tragic soarings, supposing he had been strong enough to push his way in that direction. His *Cleopatre*, for which Vaucanson had provided the asp, and which lent itself to so many epigrams, had only a semi-success, eleven performances; *Les Héraclides* died at the sixth. *Les Funérailles de Sésostris* fell flat. Thus, out of five plays performed two were great successes, two were semi-failures and one a complete rout, that is his tragic career. Later he recovered on the stage, in lyric tragedy with Piccini, and with Grétry in comic opera. He wrote *Zémire et Azor*, and *Didon*. Those are his revenges; and we cannot understand his being seized with the desire at sixty to produce some tragedy or other called *Numitor*, which remained in his portfolio.

Numitor! how could a man of culture, of talent and good sense have had such an idea and dwelt upon it for a moment?

For our part, to speak candidly, in a branch of literature as unreal as was the tragic drama of that period, we should find it impossible, if we were not guided by results, to express any preference for one or the other of those five or six tragedies; our attention when reading them is at once so much paralysed by their insipidity and tediousness that we cannot form any opinion that would differentiate and distinguish them. Of how many other tragedies could we not say the same thing, if we dared!

Marmontel's failures were a lesson to him. Marmontel is modest and does not think too highly of himself. Speaking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau whom he used to meet at this period, the time of the latter's new celebrity: 'The fruit I gained from intercourse with him, he says, and from his example, was to make me reflect on the imprudence of my youth. Here, I said, is a man who has taken time to think before writing; and I, in' the most difficult and perilous of arts, have been in a hurry to produce almost before thinking.' And conscious of possessing only a *mediocre talent* for poetry, he adds, he addresses a request to Mme de Pompadour, his patroness, for some post which will make him independent of the labour of his pen; he had in his mind a piece of advice that Mme de Tencin had given him: 'Woe, she said to me, to the man who is entirely dependent on his pen! Nothing is more precarious. The man who makes shoes

is sure of his wage ; the man who makes a book or a tragedy is never sure of anything.'

Mariontel became, then, in 1753, Secretary to the Administration of the Crown Buildings under M^r de Marigny, Mme de Pompadour's brother ; from that time he lived at Versailles, and during five years he lived pell-mell and by turns with artists, with superintendents of the Menus-Plaisirs, working according to his humour, studying at his own times, and seeing all sorts of societies of which he gives us a faithful picture, the society of the heads of departments as well as that of the philosophers, the financier Bouret as well as d'Alembert : ' Yes, I admit it, he says, all was alike to me, pleasure, study, the table, philosophy ; I loved wisdom with the wise, but I was ready to play the fool with fools. My character was still unsteady, variable and inconsistent. I adored virtue ; I yielded to the example and the attraction of vice.' And he compares himself with Aristippus as described by Horace : *Omnis Aristippum decuit color.* . . . But Mariontel was a rather robust and somewhat noisy, a rather awkward and zealous, a rather Limousin Aristippus, and not quite as Attic as the other. He is not satisfied with trying, with tasting the vices, the corruptions and the declamations of his time, he gulps them down, he adopts them, at least en passant, and there is (if we may presume to say so of a man of so much intelligence) a slight degree of silliness in his conduct. Having touched upon this point, we will quickly acknowledge his amiable social qualities, that facility to take to everything, that shrewdness under his simplicity and that cordiality which succeeds in finding ingenious expression : ' I have always found it easier, he said, to be self-sufficing in grief than in joy. As soon as my heart is sad, it desires to be alone. To be happy with myself I have need of friends.'

Mariontel often had need of his friends, for he was habitually happy. He was happy as long as he remained with M. de Marigny. He was happy when in 1758 he obtained the privilege to print the *Mercure de France* and left Versailles and the post of Secretary to the Crown Buildings to return to Paris. Established at Mme Geoffrin's, he was at all her artists' dinners, all her authors' dinners, and even at the little mysterious suppers where,

sitting between the fair Comtesse de Brionne, the beautiful Marquise de Duras and the pretty Comtesse d'Egmont, he read his *Moral Tales* in all the freshness of their bloom. The sixth book of his *Memoirs*, which takes us in detail through the different circles of the eighteenth century and introduces to us one by one the principal personages which formed them, is historically one of the most curious to consult for the study of manners and of French society. Marmontel was happy, even in his misadventures ; when he found himself in the Bastille for having offended that shallow Duc d'Aumont, he had quite a triumph : he remained there only eleven days, was treated with every kind of consideration, and came out again with a new reputation. What, I pray you, was a man of letters in those days, if he had not enjoyed the honours of the Bastille ? In losing his privilege to print the *Mercure*, Marmontel felt that spur which from time to time is good and necessary for us ; he regained his freedom and his time for the composition of longer works, and he made advances to the Academy. Lastly, what crowned his reputation was *Bélisaire* (1767), and that fifteenth chapter on Tolerance, in which the Theological Faculty discovered all sorts of damnable propositions. *Thirty-seven* propositions in the whole work were denounced and condemned.

Bélisaire is perfectly wearisome, and the famous fifteenth chapter, whose theology is so dull in itself, has lost the savour of its opportuneness, since the absolute tolerance that the author demands in the civil order is nearly won. I will touch only upon a single point that is to Marmontel's honour. When in Germinal of the year V (April 1797) Marmontel, after retiring to his hamlet of Abloville, was elected a member of the Council of Ancients by the Department of the Eure, he was expressly charged by his constituents to defend, in the National Assembly, the cause of the Catholic religion, then proscribed and persecuted, and to that end he composed a speech, which is still readable, on the free exercise of religious worship. Now, in this speech, it is in the name of the same principles of tolerance, professed in *Bélisaire* in favour of the dissenting religions, that Marmontel demands for the Catholic religion, proscribed in its turn, liberty of rites, of ceremonies, of solemnities

even, the reawakening of the church-bells in the country districts and the reappearance of the sign of the Cross. It seems to me that this noble commentary on the fifteenth chapter of *Bélisaire* is calculated to disarm controversy for ever (if it were tempted to rise up again on this occasion), and to keep irony in respect.

Voltaire, encouraging Marmontel on the occasion of this war over *Bélisaire*, wrote to him: 'Illustrious professor, crush the monster quite gently.' We know what he meant by the *monster*; but Marmontel really understood thereby nothing more than intolerance, and he did indeed set about it gently. In the letters that Voltaire writes to him, the master seems to comply with these dispositions of the disciple, when, after ridiculing the different cabals, theological and other factions, he adds: 'The chiefs of my faction are Horace, Virgil and Cicero.' He writes to him again, as if he desired in every point to acquiesce in his inclinations: 'I hear that in Paris all is faction, frivolity and wickedness. Happy the honest people who love the arts and who keep away from the tumult! . . . Literature and a noble heart are the true charm of society.' That is indeed what Marmontel thought; his soul was above all sociable and literary. In criticising the men of letters and philosophers of his time, he strips them of that bitterness and that fanaticism from which they were anything but free on certain subjects; he lends them a little of his own mildness and his own bonhomie: 'O my children! he exclaims, speaking of the conversations between d'Alembert and Mairan, what souls they were to trouble themselves about nothing more than the movements of the Ecliptic (*d'Alembert*), or about the manners and arts of the Chinese (*Mairan*)! Not a vice to degrade them, not a regret to consume them, not a passion to sadden and torment them; they are free with that freedom which is the companion of joy, and without which there never was any pure and enduring gaiety.' I think that this eulogy might fit Mairan, but as to d'Alembert, I doubt it. It is enough to read his Correspondence with Voltaire to see that his soul was not free from philosophic animosities and sectarian passions.

Speaking of the dinners given by Helvétius and d'Holbach, Marmontel carries the lenity of his memories very

far when he advances 'that there are some revered and inviolable subjects which were never submitted to the discussion of opinions. God, virtue, the sacred laws of natural morality, were never questioned, at least in my presence.' It was with sounds as with colours : Marmontel readily softened and toned down what he heard as well as what he saw.

Like the majority of the writers of his day, Marmontel formed many illusions on the goodness of the human race. He thought that all men cannot be great, but that *all may be good*. He readily believed that with *Moral Tales*, with *Bélisaïres* and with *Incas*, one can amend the world. His observation as a moralist and his talent as an artist sinned equally through this softness and this ingenuousness that never penetrated to the bottom of hearts or of human things. It is enough for the honour of his memory that on seeing men becoming suddenly wicked and savage, he arrested his bonhomie in time, and did not allow it to degenerate either into faintheartedness or silliness. He had the courage to say *no* to evil when he saw it face to face. Nominated by the Tiers-État of the Paris Commune to be an elector in 1789, with Bailly, Target, Guillotin, etc., he was at first the object of a marked favour, and it may be said that he held in his own hands his election to the States-General ; but, seeing at the price of what concessions it was to be bought, he renounced it. His popularity lasted only six days.¹ By this wise course he honoured the end of his career.

¹ On the 8 May 1789 there was, in the General Assembly of the Electors of the Tiers-État of Paris, a denunciation of the Decree of the Council which suppressed the *Journal des États-Généraux* published by Mirabeau. Target who, to win popularity, made this denunciation, demanded the unrestricted freedom of the press. On his motion a vote was taken by the Assembly, and it was reported that "the Assembly of the Tiers-État of the City of Paris unanimously protested against the Act of the Council, &c." This *unanimously* was true with the exception by one vote : 'When the vote was being taken, says Bailly in his *Mémoirs*, I remarked that one member, M. Marmontel, did not rise. He was in the second row and so hidden by those who were standing. I said nothing (Bailly was the secretary), but, in spite of the apparent unanimity, somebody, no doubt from malice, called for the contrary vote, which was not always done at that time. The President was obliged to obey, and M. Marmontel had the courage to stand up alone. Although I was not of his opinion, adds Bailly, I admired his firmness which did him honour on this occasion ; but dissatisfaction with the substance of his opinion made me foretell that he would not be a deputy.' Had Bailly indeed cause to congratulate himself upon being one ? and was not Marmontel, who was then alone in his opinion, the foreteller ?

In his old age he had more vigour than in his youth. As a young man we see him as he depicts himself, very much in society, very little of a stoic, active to succeed, to push himself in the world, to obtain patronage by honest means : if he has a footing at Mme de Pompadour's, he is not on bad terms with the little Court of the Dauphin. He does not seek favour at any price, but neither does he reject it ; he receives it very kindly when it passes his way. Marmontel is neither a Republican nor a savage. The ancien régime had ended by completely adopting him and overwhelming him with favours : he was not ungrateful. A member of the French Academy from 1763 and Permanent Secretary from 1783, historiographer of France, historiographer of the Crown Buildings, entitled to apartments in the Louvre and at Versailles, receiving pensions from the *Mercure* and from other sources, he enjoyed, in the years that preceded the Revolution, the most complete existence of a man of letters that one could desire. His works added much to his income : his grand operas, his comic operas were successes ; his *Moral Tales* had a prodigious sale ; for *Les Incas*, which were not so successful, the publisher paid him thirty-six thousand francs. Marmontel, the measure of whose desires was full, or nearly so, wanted to settle down to final happiness by marrying. He married a young and pretty niece of the Abbé Morellet ; he was fifty-four years of age, but that did not daunt him ; he was very much in love with his wife, and, he yielded with bliss to this family life for which he was made.¹ His morality, he admits, was immediately influenced by his new position, by his new interests ; without becoming rigid, it immediately ceased being lax :

' Public opinion, he says, example, the seductions of vanity, and above all the attraction of pleasure, mar in young souls the rectitude of the inner sense. The light air and tone with which old libertines jest at the scruples of virtue and ridicule the rules of a delicate honesty, make it easy for us to attach no serious importance to them. It was especially this softness of conscience that my new condition cured in me.'

' Shall I say it ? one must be a husband, one must be a father, to think sanely about those contagious vices which attack morality at its source, those pleasant and treacherous vices which bring trouble, shame, hatred, desolation, despair into the bosom of families.'

¹ 'He believes, says Saint-Lambert, that marriage and paternity were invented for him ; he enjoys them as if he had the monopoly of them.'

We applaud these honourable sentiments and these right principles ; we smile however when we think of the friend of Mlle Clairon, of Mlle Navarre and so many others, and those tardy and embellished confidences that he cannot help soon disclosing to his children. He takes great care however to add that *he has only painted himself in half-figure*. And, indeed, the volume of Marmontel's *Posthumous Works*, published in 1820, shows that when describing his wild youth in prose, he greatly toned it down.

Leaving aside the posthumous poem to which I allude,¹ Marmontel showed himself to be anything but a poet. In poetic theory he was no more than a semi-innovator, he had a leaning towards *romanticism*, if we may say so, but without foreseeing whither it led him. He was severe on Virgil, favourable to Lucan ; he was enamoured of Quinault and opposed to Boileau. When abusing the latter, he had no idea that in Boileau's lines there was more true poetry of style than in all those prosaic and pretended philosophic verses of the eighteenth century, with the exception of a few pieces of Voltaire. Criticism, by the way, did not spare Marmontel. He was chastised by Le Brun in verse and even in prose (in the paper *La Renommée littéraire*, 1763) for his impertinences to Boileau. When he took upon himself to try to correct Rotrou's *Wenceslas* in compliance with a fancy of Mme de Pompadour, Grimin remarked that to dress up Rotrou in the modern style was an undertaking which showed bad taste : ' But this remark, he adds severely, can only be made for the benefit of those who really have a good taste. They alone are able to feel that in a man of genius everything is precious, even his faults, and that it is folly to try to correct them.' When Marmontel retouched Quinault (which was a less serious matter), he was charged with having turned Quinault's verse into the style of Chapelain. Whether the reproach is just or not, matters little : these are things that are not worth the trouble of being verified. I repeat, leaving aside a poem which by reason of its nature escapes investigation and in which one would find more *verve* and wit than poetry even, we must go to Marmontel's prose to find the clearness,

¹ *La Nouvaine de Cythère.*

the elegance and the easy precision which distinguish him.

He wrote nothing better than his articles in the *Encyclopédie*, which have been collected and published with the title *Éléments de Littérature*. A diversified learning, ingenious observations of detail, well differentiated shades of thought, a delicate synonymy in diction, make it a book which may always be perused with pleasure, and which the young, if they are not proud, may read with profit.

It would be unjust to confine the whole Marmontel (excepting his *Memoirs*) to his critical articles, and not to add to them, in a quite different branch, a very small number of *Moral Tales* in which he shows inventiveness and intelligent analysis. In this delicate choice, which would demand more time than I can give to it to-day, I will only indicate the little tale entitled *Heureusement*.

Marmontel, modest, occupied, appreciated, having consciously confined himself to the subordinate kinds of literature, 'to kinds of authorship whose success, he said, could be easily pardoned,' lived happy and was even wise enough to despise the criticisms which had at all times harassed him from a distance. From this rule of conduct he departed only once, and that late in life: it was on the occasion of the quarrel on music, the open war between Gluck and Piccini. But there his moderation suddenly failed him; he threw himself into the forefront of the fray, he broke lances with everybody for Piccini, for Italian music, with an unbounded ardour and a passion in which the love of melody is less perceptible than the need to expend a remnant of youth.

It is curious to observe in Marmontel's *Memoirs* the impression produced by the approach of the Revolution. These pleasing *Memoirs*, which were like 'a walk he was taking with his children,' suddenly altered their character: with the twelfth book, we quit biography, society portraits and conversations, and petty quarrels: we enter upon the preoccupations and the serious anxieties of history. In the following books Marmontel continues to set forth facts with lucidity and to describe political personages with intelligence and animation; but it is no longer the father speaking to his children, it is the historiographer of France fulfilling his charge and his last

duties towards Louis XVI. He almost completely forgets his individuality, and only just reappears in two or three passages.

Optimistic though he was by nature, Marmontel cherished few illusions since the beginning of 1789: a memorable conversation he had with Chamfort and which he reported in full detail quickly enlightened him on the importance of the attacks and the designs of the assailants. Threatened with ruin in his turn and seeing his fortune crumbling together with the old order of things, he thought of taking shelter in some rustic retreat and continuing to look after his children's education. A few days before the 10 August, he quitted Paris and retired first to Saint-Germain in the neighbourhood of Évreux, then to Couvicourt, and from there to the hamlet of Abloville near Gaillon, where he had bought a peasant's house, with two or three acres of garden. There he allowed the storm to pass. I have said that at the reawakening of society, he was elected to the Council of Ancients by the Department of the Eure; the 18 Fructidor annulled his election, without striking him however. He returned to private life, writing to the last books for his children, books on Grammar, Logic, Morality, which testify to the lucidity of his mind as well as to the serenity and benignity of his soul. He lived long enough to see the 18 Brumaire, but not long enough to enter upon the new century; he expired with the dying century, of which he represented so well the average, distinguished, pleasing qualities, a little too mixed no doubt, but chastened in him during this honourable decline.

CHAMFORT

Monday, 22 September 1851.

CHAMFORT had too much of what Marmontel was deficient in : he had that bitterness which often accompanies power, but which does not necessarily imply it. He has left behind him a name and many witty sayings which are repeated. Some of these sayings are like well struck coin that has retained its value, but most of them are more like sharp arrows that come unexpectedly and continue to whiz. Others are terribly misanthropic. The impression he has left is therefore that of causticity personified, of a sort of envious spite. He had received from nature, under a pretty and pleasing exterior, a certain burning energy which constitutes to a high degree the literary temperament and which borders on talent : ' This energy, it has been remarked ordinarily condemns those who possess it to the misfortune, not of being without morality and having no very fine impulses, but of frequently giving way to sins which might suppose the absence of all morality. It is a *devouring asperity* which they cannot control and which makes them very odious.' He experienced and proved the disadvantage of it more than anybody. His talents were inferior to his wit and ideas, and he felt it : his energy, apparently less justified, concentrated itself more and more, it became soured and cankered him. He offers one of the most curious and one of the clearest examples of that kind of moral malady, his existence is one of those that best characterise the *man of letters* of the end of the eighteenth century. As I happen to have collected in the course of my readings many precise notions about him, I ask permission to speak of him here after others who have already done so very well, but who have considered him from the point of view which is that of all

singular studies. I should like to depict and exhibit Chamfort from the point of view of the society of his time, in his relations with the old social order, in his sensational rupture with the régime which had done everything to win him to its side, and in his eager acceptance of the new régime. In speaking of this keen and bitter mind, I will try to be moderate as always, and, without lavishing any sympathy where it is out of place, I will confine myself to a just severity. In criticising Chamfort we must guard ourselves against that acrimony which he showed in criticising others and which we lay at his door.

Chamfort was a natural son. Born in 1741 in a village near Clermont in Auvergne, he was first called *Nicolas*; it was under this name that he studied at the University of Paris, at the Collège des Grassins, as holder of a bursary, and won all his prizes. It was not until his leaving college that he entitled himself *M. de Chamfort*, in order to cut a more becoming figure in the world.¹ He knew only his mother, and was a good son. We know from himself that his mother was as lively, as impatient at eighty-five as he might have been himself; he only lost her in the summer of 1784.

Chamfort's studies had been brilliantly crowned by all the prizes won in the Rhetoric class, when his bold and independent mind began to laugh at discipline. Some escapade or other was the cause of his leaving the Collège des Grassins before finishing his Philosophy course. The young Nicolas wore at that time the dress of an Abbé, the *petit collet*, like his fellow-countryman Delille, who was likewise an Auvergnat and a natural son; but, less docile than Delille, Nicolas, when he became Chamfort, cast off the costume for which he had so little calling. He tried to make his hole in the world. He had, at his début, the most charming face, 'a son of Amor, beautiful as he, full of fire and gaiety, impetuous and malicious, studious and mischievous.' That

¹ He attached much importance to the name. One day the Marquis de Créqui said to him: 'But, Monsieur de Chamfort, it seems to me that nowadays a man of wit is all the world's equal, and that the name does not matter.'—'It is all very well your saying that, Monsieur le Marquis,' replied Chamfort; 'but just imagine that your name were M. *Criquet* instead of M. de *Créqui*; enter a drawing-room, and you will see whether the effect is the same.'

is the picture given of him by one of his comrades at the time, Sélis, the translator of Persius.¹ Chamfort, not knowing what to do for a living, had himself recommended at first to an old attorney in the capacity of junior clerk : the old attorney thought he was fitted for something better, and appointed him tutor to his son, who was only a few years younger than himself. Chamfort was thus tutor in two families ; but soon his pretty face and his lack of bashfulness gained him successes which disturbed the good order of the house. In the matter of virtue, he was anything but a Thomas. He was afterwards for a time secretary to a rich Liégeois, whom he accompanied to Germany, and with whom he soon fell out. He returned with this judicious conclusion, 'that there was nothing he was less fitted for than to be a German.' When once he had got a footing in the world, he thought that he could not do better than fully launch into it, and trust to his talent.

Whilst working in obscurity and incognito on the staff of some newspaper, he prepared a little verse comedy, and thought of competing for the prize of the French Academy. All the young authors of the time begin pretty well in the same way : that was the beaten track. Chamfort's little comedy, *La Jeune Indienne*, performed at the Comédie-Française on the 30 April 1764, is, according to Grimm, only a *childish work*, 'in which there is some facility and sentiment, indicating some hope for the author, but that is all.' *Betty*, the young Indian girl, is discovered on a desert island, in a *barbarous climate*, by a young man, a young English colonist of North America, Belton, who has been shipwrecked. She and her savage father have picked him up, fed him on the spoils of their chase, and loaded him with kind gifts. Thercupon, great eulogies of the savage contrasted with civilised man :

Voilà donc les mortels parmi nous avilis !

Belton returns to his father, bringing with him the interesting Betty :

En habit de sauvage, en longue chevelure.

The young actress who took the part of Betty, to make her acting more natural, wore in the way of dress a *skin*

¹ In an article in the *Décade philosophique*, vol. vii, page 537.

of spotted gaffra. This little Betty, a pretty sample of a savage, an Atala and a Céluta in miniature, who could not write and was astonished at everything she saw, could speak in verse however, understand the metaphors *flamme* and *hyménée*, and praise up nature on every occasion as if she did not belong to it. A certain Quaker, a character no less essential to the piece, came in time to complete this natural morality of Betty's and prevent the ungrateful Belton from sacrificing her, as he was on the point of doing. Thanks to the Quaker who provides the dowry, the play ends with a marriage before a notary, which Betty thought rather superfluous :

Quoi ! sans cet homme noir, je n'aurais pu t'ajmer !

One could hardly foresee the future Chamfort in this innocent début. Voltaire, writing to him on this occasion, and congratulating him with one of his favourite formulas (' Voilà un jeune homme qui écrira comme on faisait il y a cent ans ! '), gave expression to a few very aristocratic ideas, which were so familiar to him : ' The nation, he said, only rose out of barbarism because there happened to be three or four persons to whom nature had given genius and good taste, which she denied to all the others. . . . Our nation has good taste only by accident. We must expect a people who did not at once recognise the merits of the *Misanthrope* and *Athalie*, and who applaud so many monstrous farces, to be always an ignorant and feeble people, who need to be led by the few enlightened men.' Chamfort himself improved upon this doctrine of a small number of the elect in the matter of taste, when he replied to somebody who pointed to the judgment of the public on some work : ' The public ! the public ! how many fools does it take to make a public ? ' We shall soon have occasion to remark upon this contradiction in the future revolutionary, who, after so greatly despising the *public*, concedes everything to the *people*.

This first work of Chamfort promises no kind of poetic originality, and he was indeed destitute of it. One could distinguish only a certain natural elegance, ' the result of the sensibility of early youth,' a sensibility which he soon lost and which faded like the freshness of his face. After that time his elegance was studied and artificial. We see him trying his hand successively in all the conventional

kinds ; he has neither the power nor the idea of renovating them or of creating others. He wins an Academy prize for an epistle in verse, insipid and facile, *Epistle from a father to a son on the birth of a grandson* (1764) ; he wins another Academy prize for his *Eulogy of Molière* (1769). To the Academy of Marseilles he later sent his *Eulogy of La Fontaine* (1774), and by winning the crown, he had the satisfaction of playing a trick on La Harpe, for whom Necker had founded the prize and who thought himself sure of winning it. Previously, in the autumn of 1765, Chamfort gave, for the Court spectacles at Fontainebleau, *Palmyre*, an heroic ballet in one act, and another ballet, *Zénis et Almasie*, or perhaps he only lent his name for these two trifles to the Duc de La Vallière. But what was really his own and what he never ceased to claim credit for when the revolutionary period was at its full, was the little comedy in one act and in prose, *Le Marchand de Smyrne*, an amusing and successful trifle (January 1770), in which we see, as Chamfort said in his apology in '93, 'nobles and aristocrats of every gown put up for sale to the lowest bidder and finally given away.' That was putting it strong and lending a deep meaning after the event to the rather humorous sarcasms of this little play, in which the slave-dealer complains of having bought a certain German baron whom he has never been able to get off his hands : 'And at the last Tunis fair was I not stupid enough to buy an attorney and three Abbés, whom I have not even thought worth exhibiting in the market-place, and who are still at my house with the German baron ?' When the old society applauded these sarcasms, and when Chamfort himself scattered them over his little act, we may be sure that neither the spectators nor he himself put so much meaning into them :

'M. de Chamfort is young, said the shrewdest critic of the time (Grimm), with a pretty face, and the studied elegance of his age and his trade. I do not know him, by the way ; but if I had to guess his character from his little comedy, I should wager that he is a dandy, a good fellow at bottom, but vain, full of little airs and little mannerisms, ignorant and confusing in proportion ; in a word, of that mixed stuff which results in rather unpleasant boys of twenty to twenty-five, who ripen however and become, at the age of thirty or forty, men of merit. If he does not resemble this portrait, I ask his pardon, but I have seen all these features in the *Marchand de Symrne*. As for talent, real talent, I fear he has none ; at least his *Marchand* promises nothing at all, and does not keep more than his *Jeune Indienne* once promised.'

This opinion appears to me, in many respects, justice itself. Chamfort was then twenty-five years of age. Young, poor and proud, he foreshadowed in no respect the Republican and admirer of the 10 August, which he became since. When the King of Denmark visited Paris (December 1768), Chamfort made it the occasion of writing an epigram, which became well known, against the Duc de Duras who had been charged to amuse the monarch ; but he contrived to praise the latter, and he is the author of those lines which were cited even on the stage, and of which the final touch is as follows :

Un roi qu'on aime et qu'on révère
A des sujets en tous climats :
Il a beau parcourir la terre,
Il est toujours dans ses Etats.

Although his first freshness was already impaired, and his injured health obliged him to take the waters, Chamfort was at this time very much the fashion with the fair ladies and in the highest society ; he was very near becoming acclimatised to it :

'M. de Chamfort has arrived, wrote Mlle de Lespinasse (October 1775) ; I have seen him, and we shall read in these days his *Éloge de La Fontaine*. He has come back from the waters in good health, much richer in fame and wealth, and four lady friends, each of whom loves him enough for four ; they are Mme de Grammont, de Rancé, d'Amblymont, and the Comtesse de Choiseul. This assortment is almost as motley as Harlequin's dress ; but that is only the more piquant, the more pleasant and charming. So I warrant you that M. de Chamfort is a very contented young man, and *he does his best to be modest*.'

This modesty, so difficult to keep up, reminds me of the words of Diderot, speaking in 1767 of a 'young poet called Chamfort, of a very pleasing face, a good deal of talent, a fine appearance of modesty, and the best conditioned conceit.' *He is like a little balloon which on being pricked sends forth a violent wind.*'

Now let us hear Chamfort himself, writing at the same date as Mlle de Lespinasse from those waters at Barèges where he had made so many lady friends. His tone has become singularly moderate, and he is ready to be captivated by that flattering world which is decidedly bent on taking him up and taming him :

'I have every reason to be charmed with my visit to Barèges. It would seem to be the end of all the opposition that I have experienced,

and that all circumstances have united to dissipate that gloom or melancholy which reappeared so often. The return of my health; the kindness I have received on all hands; that good fortune, so independent of all merit, but so pleasant and comfortable, of inspiring an interest in all those to whom I have shown any attention; a few real and substantial advantages; ¹ the best founded hopes and the most approved by strict reason; the public well-being (*it was the time of the Turgot Ministry*), and that of a few persons to whom I am neither unknown nor indifferent; the tender memory of my old friends; the charm of a new but solid friendship with one of the most virtuous men in the kingdom, a man of wit, talent, and simplicity, M. Dupaty, whom you know by repute; another not less precious intimacy with an amiable woman whom I have met here, and whose feelings to me are quite those of a sister; people whose acquaintance was most desirable to me, and who are kind enough to express a fear of losing mine; in short, the union of the dearest and most desirable sentiments: these are the causes of my happiness the last three months; my evil Genius appears to have let go its hold upon me, and I have been living for three months under the wand of the kind Fairy.'

Such gentle words are not so frequent under Chamfort's pen, and his heart is not so ready to harbour indulgent feelings, that we should neglect to notice them when we come across them.

His great success, or at least his greatest literary effort in the following year, was his tragedy of *Mustapha et Zéangir*. He is said to have worked at it for fifteen years; six months would have been more than enough. The matter of it is taken from an old play by an obscure author, Belin. The theme is the brotherly love of the two sons of Solyman, two sons of different beds, who should in the natural course of things have been divided by love, ambition and every other passion, but who love one another and die in each other's arms. Admitting that kind of composition, it has a certain simplicity, and the critics agree in commending its pure style and its *mild sentiments*, which is strange enough in a tragedy and in an author like Chamfort: he reserved all his mildness for his tragedies. He shows himself a weak disciple of Racine in *Bajazet* and Voltaire in *Zaïre*. The play was first performed at the Court theatre at Fontainebleau (1 and 7 November 1776), before the young Queen Marie-Antoinette. It is said that Louis XVI wept at this performance and at this conflict of brotherly love between Mustapha and Zéangir. People saw in it a touching

¹ His *Éloge de La Fontaine* alone brought him in 4,400 livres, partly out of M. Necker's fund and partly the gift of a stranger who had added 3000 livres to the prize. *

allusion to the intimate union prevailing between the King and his brothers. As soon as the piece was played and applauded, the Queen summoned Chamfort to her box, wishing to be the first to make known to him that the King had granted him a pension of 1200 livres out of the Menus Plaisirs. She added to it everything that her natural grace could suggest to heighten the value of this favour. 'Tell us,' said a courtier to him on his leaving the box, 'all the flattering things the Queen has said to you.' — 'I could never either forget or repeat them,' replied the poet. That was not the end of favours, and the Prince de Condé immediately appointed Chamfort his private secretary, with a pension of 2000 livres.

When, in the following winter, the tragedy of *Mustapha* was performed in Paris, at the Comédie-Française, its success was not so warm. But the Queen did not cease to take the keenest interest in it; it was the tragedy of her adoption. On the day after this first performance at Paris, she said in presence of all the ambassadors that she had been in a fever of anxiety on the day before, 'in the condition of the *Métromane*, until the moment when she heard of its success.' She charged Rulhière, as a friend of the author, to compliment him in her name, which he did in five very sugary lines. We know that Chamfort arranged his friends in three classes: 'my friends who love me, my friends who do not care in the least for me, and my friends who detest me.' One is not puzzled to know in which class he ranked Rulhière, after reading the almost odious portrait which he has left of him. 'I have never done more than one spiteful thing in my life,' Rulhière said to him one day.—'When will it end?' replied Chamfort.¹ Be this as it may, the Queen was all through as gracious and friendly towards talent as a queen and a woman could be.²

¹ M. Daunou, in his Notice on Rulhière, appears to attribute this note to M. de Talleyrand.

² *Mustapha et Zangir* appeared in print in 1778 and was dedicated to the Queen; here is the Dedication, which has not been reproduced in the editions of Chamfort's works: 'Madame, the kind approval with which Your Majesty has deigned to honour the tragedy of *Mustapha et Zangir* made me conceive the hope of presenting this work to you, and your kindness has made this wish dearer to my gratitude. Happy if I could, Madame, consecrate it by fresh efforts, if I could justify your benefits by other works, and bud favour with Your Majesty through the merit of my works rather than through the choice of subject! Indeed,

So far it will be admitted that Chamfort does not seem to have had very much reason to complain of the old society, and that he was paid out of proportion for his productions. However he is not satisfied. I presume to believe that if his distinguished, but short-breathed and sterile talent, which only sought pretexts for not relapsing, had been on a level with his intelligence and his wit, and if his vein had flowed from the source, he would have been less peevish and less unhappy. Nothing is more comforting to a man of letters than to produce, nothing reconciles him more effectually with others and with himself. No doubt thought alone, solitary reflexion, is also comforting; but this contemplative meditation, in an ardent nature, demands a sort of virtue in order not to turn to sourness and envy when measuring itself with others. Active labour on the other hand, when it is translated into works, keeps our minds from that perpetual comparison which we are tempted to draw between ourselves and other less worthy and often more favoured persons, and fulfils better the ends of life, which consist in being or believing oneself useful, and not entrenching oneself behind an abnegation that is painful to keep up and hardly sincere. Chamfort's misfortune lay, even before he was forty years of age, in his inactivity and his sterility.¹ His excess in pleasures had quickly destroyed his health and youth. Unable to guide his passions, he had yielded to them, flattering himself with the idea that he was able to stifle them: 'I have destroyed my passions almost as a violent man kills his horse, when he cannot control it.' We are told that his face, once so attractive, was disfigured by pleasures and at last became hideous through ill humour. Weak in health, nervous, excited, living in a great artificial society where he was made perpetually sensible of the disproportion of fortunes, and to which he was no longer drawn by his passions, he wished to retire from it and could only half do so. He heard himself

Madame, the triumph of brotherly affection, the generous friendship and the magnanimous combats of two heroes naturally had too many claims on your heart, and to depict virtues was to secure the honour of Your Majesty's approval.—I am with very deep respect, Madame, Your Majesty's very humble, very obedient and very faithful subject, *Chamfort.*

¹ *Chamfort is polishing his hectic verses*, says Le Brun in an epigram, to express his sterility and lack of vein.

blamed for these semi-retreats, which so angered him, that he would rush back by fits and starts into that world which was both unbearable and necessary to him,—necessary, for it was the stage on which he displayed with most success that steely pleasantry, a skilful fencing-art in which he was a past master. He was a Duclou, but more polished and more delicate, and every shot he fired was wonderfully effective. One never comes to sincerely hate or despise the field of battle which is most favourable to the exploits in which one shines. On the other hand, his serious, reflective instincts developed with the years; in many points he attained to some depth; he flattered himself on having reached a state of wisdom, of stoicism, of superior indifference which allows external things no hold upon us. But his acrid humour, the accumulated bile in his blood soon baffled his week-old projects; he was a prey to every contradiction, and finally to new passions.

All that I put forward here may be proved in detail by his own confessions. The old society, all the fine world, the Grammonts, the Choiseuls, the Queen, seeing a young poet whose works were promising and who paid cash by his wit, wished to patronise him and admit him on the footing on which men of letters were admitted at that time. With a pension from the *Mercure*, another out of the Menus Plaisirs, a post as private Secretary to the Prince de Condé or as Reader to the Comte d'Artois, a post as Secretary to Madame Elisabeth (for Chamfort had all that), with a seat in the Academy to which he was elected in 1781, with a lodging that M. de Vaudreuil gave him in his mansion in the Rue de Bourbon, people said: 'M. de Chamfort has an established position, he has enough to live on; let him then come into society, let us have the benefit of him, and let him amuse us with his charming and malicious wit!' But Chamfort, who divined all that, only retired the oftener the more he was feted, and was revolted by what would have softened any other:

'I have always been shocked, he wrote to a friend, by the ridiculous and insolent opinion, which is current almost everywhere, that a man of letters who has an income of four or five thousand francs is at the *apogee* of fortune. Having almost reached that term, I felt that I had enough to retire upon, and I was naturally inclined to that course. But as chance has willed it that my society is sought by many persons of

a much more considerable fortune, it has come to this that my competence is become a real poverty in consequence of a succession of duties that are imposed upon me by my associating with a world that I did not seek. I have found myself absolutely obliged either to make a trade of literature in order to make up for shortcomings in respect of fortune, or to solicit favours, or lastly to make myself suddenly rich by a sudden retreat. The two first courses did not suit me : I intrepidly adopted the latter. There was a great outcry : I was considered odd, eccentric. All this clamour is foolishness ! You know that I excel in translating my neighbour's thoughts. All that people said on the subject came to this : What ! are you not sufficiently paid for your pains and your running of errands by the honour of associating with us, by the pleasure of amusing us, by the charm of being treated by us as no other man of letters is treated ?

'To that I reply : I am forty years of age. Of those petty triumphs of vanity of which men of letters are so enamoured, I have had enough and to spare. Since, by your own admission, I have hardly anything to expect, permit me to retire. If society is of no good to me, I must begin to be good to myself. It is ridiculous to grow old as an actor in a company in which one cannot even aspire to a half share. Either I will live alone, concerned with myself and my happiness, or, if I live among you, I will enjoy a portion of the freedom that you grant to men whom you yourselves would not think of comparing with me. I protest against your way of regarding the men of my class. What is a man of letters according to your ideas, and, in truth, according to the established usages of the world ? He is a man to whom you say : You shall live poor, and only too happy to hear your name sometimes mentioned ; we will pay you, not any real respect, but a few attentions that will flatter your vanity, on which we build, and not the pride which befits a man of sense. You will write, you will compose poetry and prose for which you shall receive a few eulogies, many insults and a few crowns, until you are able to pick up a little pension of twenty-five or fifty louis, which you will have to scramble for with your rivals in the mud, just as the rabble do for the coins that are thrown to them on public holidays.'

Chamfort here tells us his secret, he tells it us with spirit and a kind of rage. As he has a good stock of dignity and probity in his acrimony, he is loath to accept benefits from people whose every caprice and vice he knows, and whose corruptions and shallowness he takes a cruel and pitiless delight in observing. And yet he is sensible that he is sharing in their charity, that he is taking advantage of it, and he feels it. So on the day when he loses all his pensions in the ruin of the ancien régime, passion gets the better of interest, he leaps with joy, he feels himself relieved and free.

'To despise money,' he exclaims, is to dethrone a king : it has a zest.' We feel the refinement of pride in this philosophic tone. It was Chamfort who said : 'I have seen few kinds of pride that pleased me. The best I know is that of Satan in *Paradise Lost*.' But it was

difficult, it will be admitted, for the old society to divine this Satanic pride in the sensitive and harmless author of *La Jeune Indienne*, or in the mild tragic painter of Zéangir. Rivarol himself was mistaken. On hearing of Chamfort's election to the Academy, he said rather affectedly : ' It is a lily of the valley grafted on poppies.' But what he took to be a lilly of the valley had the pride of the cedar.

Chamfort always had a mortal grudge against the old society for regarding him as an amiable poet and treating him accordingly.

So much bitterness, however, could not come from a sane mind or from a man who was perfectly well. And Chamfort was not. Justifying himself to a friend who reproached him with pride and hardness of heart in the face of benefits : ' My friend, he wrote, I do not share, I think, the petty and vulgar ideas on that point which are so widespread ; nor am I a monster of pride ; but I have once been poisoned with sugared arsenic, and it shall not occur again : *Manet alta mente repostum.*' Yes, Chamfort had once been poisoned, and some of the poison always remained in his blood.

What was the fatal occasion to which Chamfort alludes, and on which he had so much cause to repent of his confidence ? I do not know, and it is not important enough to be investigated ; for, with his character and humour, if an occasion was wanting he would have created it. He was one of those who excel in extracting bitterness out of everything, and would verify this line :

La rose a des poisons qu'on finit par trouver.

He admits however having had two years of happiness in life and six months of perfect felicity. He had retired to the country with a friend who was older than himself, but with whom he felt a perfect harmony of feelings and thoughts. He lost her, and appears to have buried with her the remnants of his heart. He never speaks of her but in terms that betoken deep tenderness :

* When my heart has need of tenderness, I recall the loss of friends who are no more, of women whom death has snatched from me ; I dwell in their coffin, I send my soul to wander around theirs. Alas ! I possess three tombs.'

I will try to extract from Chamfort's Thoughts a few that are of a milder nature, more in conformity with this simple sentiment, and which are sad without being too acrid :

' I asked M . . . (this M . . . is himself) why, in condemning himself to obscurity, he avoided the benefits he might receive : " There is nothing, he said to me, that men can give me that makes it worth while remembering them." '

' What can the Great and the Princes do for me ? Can they give me back my youth, or prevent my thoughts, which are my comfort in everything ? '

' An old man, thinking me too susceptible with regard to some injustice or other, said to me : " My dear son, we must learn from life to suffer life." '

' Man arrives as a novice at each age of life.'

' In the artlessness of a well-born child, there is sometimes a very pleasing philosophy.'

' M . . . (that is himself) was being plagued about his love of solitude ; he replied : " The fact is that I am more accustomed to my own faults than to others." '

But in order not to give a wrong idea of Chamfort, we ought immediately to contrast these thoughts with others, vigorous, cruel, venomous thoughts, which seem indeed to be a calumny on both society and nature. For example :

' Nature, in overwhelming us with misery and giving us an unconquerable attachment to life, seems to have behaved to man like an incendiary who sets fire to our house, after placing sentries at our doors. The danger must be very great to oblige us to leap out of window.'

' M. de Lassay, a very indulgent man, but with a great knowledge of society, said that we should swallow a *toad* every morning, in order to fortify ourselves against the disgust of the rest of the day, when we have to spend it in society.'

This M. de Lassay Chamfort makes his mouthpiece to express his own thoughts. He does not spare his fellow-men of letters any more than he spares society and nature :

' Judging from the tone that has prevailed the last ten years in literature, literary celebrity appears to me to be a sort of defamation which has not yet quite as many bad effects as the *casan*, but that will come.'

Elsewhere, among the many reasons he puts forward for not publishing anything :

' It is, he says, because I should not like to imitate those men of letters who are like asses kicking and fighting before an empty rack.'

Among all the reasons he went so far to seek for preserving silence, he said again :

'The truth is that if there is a man on earth who is justified in living by himself it is I, after the spiteful treatment I have received after every success.'

What was this spiteful treatment ? a few criticisms no doubt, some cabal against *Mustapha et Zéangir*. By strangely exaggerating them, as well as the importance of his early works which are so insignificant, and which were so overpaid, Chamfort had come to hate, with a hatred that shows through all his words, both the caballers and the patrons.

I will not quote any more of those atrocious and corrosive thoughts which burn the paper so to say ; to quote them means being responsible for them to a certain extent. Chamfort has the injustice to say those extreme things which should not be addressed to the human race in a mass any more than to an individual ; for, after such fierce judgments, it only remains to turn one's back upon oneself and never to see oneself again. When two men have once spat in each other's faces without killing each other, they cannot meet again. Now, Chamfort's thoughts are a continual spitting of crude and cynical contempt : 'Man is a stupid animal, to judge by myself,' he says. When Molière, in a comedy, makes one of his characters say this sort of thing, it is in place and we may laugh. But written crudely and in cold blood, it is too cheap, and the author merits our replying, after reading this compliment : 'Speak for yourself !'

The majority of Chamfort's maxims relating to society only apply to the very highest in which he lived, the society of the Great ; and happily they are falsified as soon as we consider a world that is less artificial, more domestic, from which natural feelings are not abolished. It was only in reference to the highest society that Chamfort was able to say : 'It appears impossible, in the present state of society, to find a single man who is able to display his whole soul and the details of his character, and especially of his weaknesses, to his best friend.' It was solely this great world that he had in his mind when he said : 'The best philosophy relatively to the world is to combine, when thinking of it, the sarcasm of humour

with the indulgence of contempt.' It was from having lived too long on this scene of unequal struggle, stratagem and vanity, that he was able to utter his famous mot : ' I have been brought to this by degrees ; living with and seeing men, the heart must either *break or bronze*.'

I may add, in order to invalidate the authority of certain maxims of Chamfort and to denounce their false side, that they evidently come from a man who never had any family, who never had any objects of affection either in the ascending or the descending line, who had no father and who in his turn had no desire to be one. He repeats it in twenty places : ' What man, if he consulted reason alone, would wish to be a father ? . . .—I do not want to marry, he said again, for fear of having a son who is like me.'—And he added with pride : ' Yes, for fear of having a son who, being poor like myself, can neither lie, nor flatter, nor cringe, and has to go through the same ordeals as myself.' The conclusion I come to is simply that his morality is that of a used up and soured bachelor, a man who has established his own misfortune into an irony and a system. ' The man who is not a misanthrope at forty, he thought, has never loved his fellow-men.' That is true only of the bachelor ; for nature usually avenges herself upon him, if he does not take care, for not having been satisfied and obeyed in her lawful aims, by making him cold and cynical. But in marriage, which is the common state, the point of view changes : marriage is a great burden, but it is also a means of hope. ' a fine invention, somebody has said, for interesting us in the future as well as in the present.' We have children, we wish them to be some day in happy circumstances, and therafter we insensibly incline to the hope that the world will not grow from bad to worse, that it will grow better. We live again, we become young again, and every grandfather, bending over the cradle of his grandchildren, understands better than any philosopher or great moralist the imperceptibly linked chain of generations and that eternal recommencement of the world.

That was what Chamfort, great renovator though he was, did not understand. What a strange contradiction in a man who declared himself so ardent an advocate of progress and the emancipation of the human race !

He was so passionately and frantically in favour of celibacy that, if he had had his way, the world would have ended with him. *Marriage* and *Royalty* were the two things that amused him most : 'They are, he confessed with a boast, the two inexhaustible sources of my pleasures.' He had seen marriage only in the great world of his time where it was so decried and he refused to see the monarchy under any but the equally decried form of Louis XV. He could not rise above the conditions of his circle and his time, and in that respect, with all his intellect, he was not, as Roederer very rightly remarked, really enlightened.

He had however much charm and fascination in details, and gave one the illusion of being a man of great intelligence when he condescended to please. He was not at his best in the world and in the regular circle : there he talked much and even too much, and he would speak for hours together, telling anecdote after anecdote, discharging epigram after epigram, and scattering with an easy air all those sallies, all those ready-made mots, all those stores of wit which were found collected after his death among his little papers. In this purely mundane form he made a brilliant, but dry and withering impression : 'Do you know, said Mme Helvétius to the Abbé Morellet, that when I have had Chamfort's conversation in the morning, I am saddened for the rest of the day ?' He showed to best advantage in a more familiar, more select society, where he felt that he was appreciated as he wished to be. Two important witnesses, who had an unequal share in his intimacy, speak about him in the same tone, and describe him in the years which precede '89. Mirabeau, in some familiar Letters to Chamfort, speaks to him not only as his dearest and most sympathetic, but his most stimulating, his most inspiring friend. Chamfort was the man who provided his friends with most ideas and opinions in conversation ; it was enough to lead him on to a subject and to spur him a little : 'I cannot deny myself the pleasure, said Mirabeau to him, of rubbing the most electric head that I have ever known.' I will not venture to repeat all Mirabeau's praises, which might appear exaggerated. *Tacitus and you*, he says somewhere. Chamfort, by the way, agreed with him : 'I have, he said, a *Tacitus* in my head and a *Tibullus* in my heart.' Neither

Tibullus nor Tacitus were able to come out of him for the benefit of posterity.

M. de Chateaubriand, in his *Essai sur les Révolutions*, speaks of Chamfort with an enthusiasm almost equal to that of Mirabeau. This portrait of Chamfort by Chateaubriand is admirable for its touch and its life, and I really do not know why the illustrious author afterwards recalled and disowned it :

'Chamfort, he said, was above the middle height, a little bent, with a pale face, a sickly complexion. His blue eyes, often cold and clouded in repose, flashed fire when he became animated. Rather open nostrils gave to his physiognomy an expression of sensibility and energy. His voice was flexible, its modulations followed the movements of his soul; but, in the latter part of my residence at Paris, it had taken on some asperity, and one discerned in it the agitated and imperious note of factions. I have always been astonished that a man who had so much knowledge of men could so warmly espouse any cause whatever.'

How can we help comparing this physical portrait of Chamfort with that which Mirabeau draws ? Maintaining that his friend, in spite of his sufferings, *is one of the most vivacious beings in existence* : 'Your slender frame, he says to him, the delicacy of your features, and the resigned and even somewhat melancholy softness of your physiognomy, when it is calm and your head or your heart are not agitated, are calculated always to alarm and mislead your friends about your strength.' And he concludes that in his case, instead of the blade wearing out the scabbard, it is the soul, the *vis ignea* that keeps the machine going : 'How is it that his inner fire does not consume him ? people think. Well ! why should it consume him ? it is this fire that keeps him alive. Give him another soul, and his frail existence will fall to pieces.'

Shortly before the Revolution, Chamfort, who lived with his great friend the Comte de Vaudreuil, that is to say in the very midst of the Polignac world, in the middle of the enemy's camp, contrived to shake himself free, and went to lodge in the Arcades of the Palais-Royal. We know what the Palais-Royal was at that time. Marmontel having laughingly remarked to him that the *habitantes* of that place were dangerous, Chamfort answered : '*I am like the salamander.*'

But if he was proof to one danger, he forgot another :

the Palais-Royal was also the focus of revolutionary fanaticism, and he burnt himself at it.

His influence during these ardent years was real, but it was exercised entirely in conversations, in witty conceits, in those flights of fancy which sometimes occurred to him, 'which, as is very rarely the case, made one laugh and think at the same time.'¹ The Comte de Lauraguais, who judges him very correctly, tells us² that Chamfort coming to see him one morning, said : 'I have just composed a work.'—'What ! a book ?'—'No, not a book, I am not such a fool, but a book-title, and this title is everything. I have already made a present of it to the puritan Sieyès, who can comment upon it at his pleasure. He may say what he pleases, but people will only remember the title.'—'What is the title ?'—'This is it : *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-Etat ? Tout. Qu'a-t-il été ? Rien.* (What is the Third Estate ? Everything. What was it before ? Nothing).' That is in fact the title and the beginning of Sieyès' famous brochure. M. de Lauraguais, who tells the story, has no interest in overrating Chamfort at Sieyès' expense ; we may suppose then that Chamfort was to the latter what he was so often to Mirabeau, that is to say the electric head which, at the slightest rubbing, gives forth a spark.

It was for Mirabeau that Chamfort wrote the speech against Academies, which was to be delivered by the great orator in the Assembly. The speech itself is piquant, but the act itself is one of the greatest blots on Chamfort's memory. A man who, like him, had begun his career by winning Academy prizes, who always had the Academy in prospect, who had enlisted all his friends, even his friends at Court, until he was admitted, this man should have been the last to take up his pen to denounce in public its abuses and to solicit the destruction of a body of which he was a member. We may smile at many of the points in this speech which Mirabeau compared to a pamphlet of Lucian, but the conduct is morally open to condemnation.

Chamfort did nothing with perseverance. He left it to others to carry out and contented himself with giving the

¹ The words are by Mme Roland in her Portrait of Chamfort.

² *Lettres de J.-B. Lauraguais à Madame. . . , Paris, 1802, p. 160 ff.*

stimulus. He excelled in summing up a situation, a counsel, a general impression, in a single word. During the Revolution, he coined bons mots. '*War to the castles! peace to the cottages!*' was one of those watchwords, one of those firebrands which immediately flew over the whole country. Later, very late, when he saw written on all the walls the motto: '*Fraternity or death.*' he translated it: '*Be my brother, or I kill you.*' But that extinguished nothing.

Chamfort's revolutionary ardour did not stop even at the 10 August: he wrote two days after to a friend, after telling him that he had made his pilgrimage to the Place Vendôme, to the Place des Victoires, to the Place Louis XV, and that he had visited the ruined statues of Louis XV and Louis XIV:

' You see, he said at the end of his letter, that though I am not gay, I am not exactly sad. It is not because tranquillity is restored and because the people only last night pursued the aristocrats, and among others the journalists of their party. But one must resign oneself to mischances of that kind. They must necessarily happen in the case of a new people who for three years have been continually speaking of their sublime Constitution, but are going to destroy it, and have not in truth organised anything yet but an insurrection. That is a small matter, it is true, but it is better than nothing.'

Such words show how far Chamfort, in spite of some depth and penetration, was little more than a man of wit without any true lights who had become fanaticised.

This satiric observer, who had so often despised the public and reviled the human race, now astonished even Mme Roland by his confidence in a new people led by a few violent men. The truth is that the craving for equality stifled every other feeling in him. All the old inequalities, all those so imperceptible social gradations on which he had lived for thirty years, that bed of roses which he had turned into a bed of thorns, returned to his memory with rage and devoured him. He had treasures of rancour in him. As long as things were destroyed and levelled, all means were alike to him. 'Would you have us, he asked Marmontel, make revolutions with rose-water?'¹

¹ Once, when he went into society, he felt the want of a carriage of his own: 'I am delicate and short-sighted, he wrote to a friend (about 1782); I have hitherto picked up nothing but mud, coughs, colds and indigestion, not to speak of the risk of being run over twenty times every winter. It is time that that came to an end.' In fact he often said

In a publication of the time in which he had a share (*Tableaux historiques de la Révolution*), remarking that few of those men who had taken part in the beginning had been able to follow the movement to the last, he adds : ' It is a pleasure not unworthy of a philosopher to observe at what period of the Revolution each of them forsook it or took part against it.' And he notes the moment when La Fayette, when Barnave stopped : ' What shall we say, he exclaims, when we see La Fayette, after the night of the 6 October, devoting himself to Marie-Antoinette, and this same Marie-Antoinette, arrested at Varennes with her husband, brought back to the capital, and playing a game of whist with young Barnave in the Tuilleries ? ' As to himself, the ci-devant young poet favoured by the Queen, late Secretary to Madame Elisabeth, he stopped only at the last extremity, and we have difficulty in seizing the precise moment when he cried : It is enough ! He had a few piquant words against the Terror, but no words of indignation or execration. Appointed under the Roland Ministry to the librarianship of the National Library, he had to defend himself against the denunciations of a subordinate who coveted his place, and his apology is of such a nature that it seems rather to aggravate his wrong-doings to-day. He never was a Girondist, as he openly exclaims : he hardly knows the Girondists, and renounces them ; he claims to have been a Jacobin, nothing but a Jacobin.

We know that once arrested and threatened with arrest a second time, he tried to kill himself in his rooms at the Library, that he failed, destroyed an eye, wounded himself but was unable to deal himself a mortal blow. He was recovering or seemed to be in a fair way of recovery when he died from the imprudent act, so it is said, of his physician, on the 13 April 1794, too soon to witness the public deliverance and the fall of Robespierre. He had not desired it soon enough to deserve to witness it. He was fifty-three years of age.

The fairest and most lenient judgment that it is possible

in '91 and '92 : ' I shall not believe in the Revolution as long as I see coaches and carriages running over the foot-passengers.' There is much personal resentment hidden under great political theories. A man would like a carriage of his own in 1782, and, not having had it, he will allow nobody to have one in '92.

to pass upon him seems to me that of Roederer in an article in the *Journal de Paris*, which has been reproduced in the most complete edition of Chamfort's Works. The end of his career is a terrible example of the germ of fanaticism that may lodge and develop in the most distinguished, the most cultured and even the apparently most blasé natures. Chamfort will continue however to be mentioned in the first rank of those who have wielded French wit with most dexterity and boldness. Too sickly and too irritable ever to deserve a place among true moralists, his name will remain associated with a number of concise, sharp, vibrating and picturesque mots, which arouse attention and fix themselves willy-nilly in the memory.

But take care! I fear there is always a little arsenic behind them.

RULHIÈRE

Monday, 29 September 1851.

IN the last third of the eighteenth century, three men distinguished themselves, as it in emulation of each other, by a delicate, piquant, satiric, mocking wit, and at the same time proved themselves to be of a serious turn of mind ; they were Chamfort, of whom we spoke the last time, Rivarol, of whom we shall perhaps speak some day, and Rulhière, who left some interesting works and is remembered for a few neat poems, and who certainly deserves a study. Rulhière had a physiognomy quite his own ; he had real talent and a style ; he was not only a witty, but a learned and clever writer, who, after long scattering his niceties and elegancies over society subjects, tried in the end to collect his forces, and applied them, with a certain success, to great historical subjects.

A man of society and of the highest society, and anxious to pass for such, reserved, diplomatic and a little wrapped up in himself, very little inclined to confessions, we know hardly anything precise about his beginnings. He is supposed to have been born about 1735 (others say sooner) ; he was the son and grandson of Inspectors of the Maréchaussée of the Île-de-France ; he was educated at the Collège Louis-le-Grand ; on leaving school he served in the Gendarmes of the Guard, and was aide-de-camp to the Maréchal de Richelieu. Then, transferred from the military service to diplomacy, we see him attached in the capacity of Secretary to the Baron de Breteuil. M. de Breteuil had been appointed in 1700 Minister Plenipotentiary in Russia ; Rulhière accompanied him thither ; he was ~~a~~ near witness of the revolution which, in 1762, precipitated Peter III and placed Catherine II on the throne. Following his observant nature, he endeavoured to divine and unravel all the facts in connexion with this

extraordinary event, and, on his return to Paris, made them the subject of a story which charmed society. The Comtesse d'Egmont, the daughter of the Maréchal de Richelieu, who was Rulhière's divinity, entreated him to write down what he told so well : he obeyed her, and, once the story was written, the author's vanity got the better of the diplomat's discretion, and readings became frequent. They caused a sensation. Catherine II and her admirers were alarmed ; they tried every means to induce Rulhière to suppress his story, or to alter it : he resisted all their offers with an honourable firmness. Grimm, who was so well qualified to appreciate Rulhière, with whom he had more than one feature in common, has left a picture of one of these readings of the *Révolution de Russie* at Mme Geoffrin's, and if we relied on this page of Grimm, which was intended to be read at St. Petersburg, we should gain a very unjust idea of Rulhière : that of a man of talent, but thoughtless and indiscreet, and he was anything but that. If, in a single case, he yielded to a first indiscretion, he took every care to correct insensibly the impression it may have made, and to avoid a repetition of it. Under his somewhat robust and dense exterior, Rulhière was shrewd, adroit, guarded and circumspect, yet much more of a man of letters at bottom than he wished to appear, always on the look out for subjects for epigrams, comedies, stories, afterwards working them up in secret, at his leisure, with deliberation, without betraying himself to the public, confining himself to captivating the society of his time, and with a distant outlook on posterity.

About the year 1700 he was quite in vogue by reason of two works of different kind, but the outcome of one and the same intellectual nature, that anecdotic account of the *Russian Revolution*, and by a *Discours en vers sur les Disputes*. Voltaire, to whom Rulhière sent this *Discours*, replied to him : 'I owe you, sir, the greatest pleasure I have had for a long time. I am madly fond of fine poetry. The lines you have had the kindness to send me are of the kind which were written a hundred years ago, when the Boileaus, the Molières, the La Fontaines were in the world. In my last illness I presumed to write a letter to Nicolas Despréaux ; you have done much better ; you write like him.' Voltaire did more, he inserted the whole

Epistle under the word *Dispute* in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, with the following note : ' Read the following lines on Disputes ; this is the way they wrote in the good times.' And, indeed, this Epistle, which has been reproduced in all the literary Readers and that we knew by heart in our boyhood, resembles in tone the best of Boileau's Epistles, and is superior to them in thought. Certain smart allusions, by turns satirical and flattering, to contemporary personages, added to its newness, made it a more animated and living thing than it appears to us to-day. The touches of satire, the proverbial expressions, the happy unions of names and ideas, an elegant conciseness, all the elements that go to make up and embellish the temperate moral poem, are artistically placed, and it really lacks only a less dry and more coloured poetic inspiration, when the author tries to soar and to depict, for example, the temple of Opinion carried upon clouds through the air : here we feel, as in all the poetry of the time, the lack of wings and true imagination, the absence of softness, of freshness and charm. Rulhière ends his Epistle by comparing poetry with the honey of the bees ; but we do not hear their humming.

The *Anecdotes sur la Révolution de Russie en l'année 1762* is a very agreeable little book without any solemn pretensions, in which the historical events themselves are only envisaged from the point of view of morals. The side of the narrative where the author aims at the style of Sallust and recalls that of Saint-Réal and other classical authors of Conspiracies, is not too prominent. We can understand that, in spite of Rulhière's observant mind and in spite of his favourable position for unravelling many things, he must have been frequently reduced to guesses and conjectures in an event so involved in mysteries and complications, and we cannot be astonished if his narrative was exposed to the recriminations of the interested : it could not be otherwise. Even the Russians could neither have nor express an independent opinion on matters concerning their own history, and a history so contemporaneous. It seems to me however that the principal points of Rulhière's account have been generally adopted since, and that by historians (such as Lévesque) who have been least inclined to follow him. There are certainly some recesses of the Russian genius that Rul-

hière neither penetrated nor appreciated ; living only at St. Petersburg and in the highest society, he saw in this very incongruous people above all the morals of the Lower Empire ; he thought he saw in them a kind of Greek Empire at its decline, and he did not sufficiently detect, under the veneer of an advanced civilisation, a young and nascent nation. Similarly in what he says of Catherine, though quick enough to see that she had been fashioned by nature for the most elevated position, he does not appear to have quite realised that virile genius which was to make her rank, with Elizabeth of England, among the small number of great monarchs. We cannot say, however, that Catherine was either misjudged or still less calumniated by the man who at the very beginning drew of her this memorable and living portrait :

'She has an agreeable and noble figure ; a proud step ; her person and carriage are full of grace. She has the air of a sovereign. All her features proclaim a great character. Her neck is high and her head very detached ; the union of these two parts is, especially in profile, of remarkable beauty ; and in the movements of her head she takes some care to exhibit this beauty. Her brow is broad and open, her nose almost aquiline ; her mouth fresh and embellished by her teeth ; her chin rather large and slightly double, without being fat. She has chestnut hair of the greatest beauty, brown eyebrows ; brown and very handsome eyes ; the reflexions of the light cause a blue shade, and her complexion is of the greatest brilliancy. The distinctive mark of her physiognomy is pride. The charm and goodness, which are not wanting, appear to keen eyes to be the effect of an extreme desire to please, and her alluring expression shows only too clearly that its design is to allure.'

On his return from his Northern travels, Rulhière lived, then, at Paris on the best footing, much appreciated for certain little works which it was regarded as a favour to be admitted to hear, pretty poems like *L'A-propos*, *Le Don du Contre-temps*, which he recited with the certainty of being applauded, for some very biting epigrams which he allowed to circulate without acknowledging them, but for which he gained all the credit. He enjoyed the most brilliant reputation as an *unpublished* author that one could desire. The Minister, M. de Choiseul, commissioned him in 1768 to write, for the instruction of the Dauphin (Louis XVI), the History of the troubles in Poland ; it was this quite contemporaneous history, the matter of which was every day being unrolled before his eyes, that Rulhière endeavoured during twenty-two years to treat after the manner of the Ancients, without

bringing it to a successful conclusion, and which to-day forms his most considerable title to fame.

Without bearing the title of historiographer, Rulhière was therefore an *ex-officio* historian much more than a society poet, and in spite of his good taste he is said to have betrayed himself : 'M. de Rulhière, said Mme Necker, would drop hints in conversation on his profession as historian, with pedantic intention ; he would attach too great importance to the investigation of a little fact and all its circumstances ; he would never see the Opera except from behind the scenes.' This rather subtle and too analytical turn of mind, which Rulhière intruded into society, appears nowhere better than in a conversation that has been preserved by Diderot.¹ Rulhière thought that we should not be in too great a hurry, when in company, to ask information about a stranger who comes into the room : 'With a little patience and attention there is no need to trouble either the master or the mistress of the house, and we can enjoy the pleasure of guessing.' He had all sorts of precepts, little very shrewd, very ingenious remarks, which he would demonstrate when called upon, and he was seldom mistaken :

'He illustrated his theory in my presence at Mlle Dorval's house, Diderot tells us : there entered in the course of the evening a man he did not know ; this man spoke without raising his voice ; he had an easy bearing, purity of expression, and his manners were cold and polite. "He is connected with the Court," Rulhière whispered to me.' Then he remarked that he almost always had his right hand on his chest, with the fingers closed and the nails turned outwards : "Ah ! ah ! he added, he is a lance-corporal in the Body Guards, and he only wants his rainbow." Shortly after, this man tells a little story : "There were four of us, he said, Madame and Monsieur So-and-so, Madame de . . . and myself." Thereupon my *instructor* continued : "Now I know all about him. Our friend is married ; the woman he mentioned in the third place must be his wife, and when he named her he told me his own name."

When relating this proof of Rulhière's rather methodical and subtle sagacity, Diderot gives us to understand that all these *delicate* things, conceived in *very delicate* terms, were too much so for him, a plain, simple bonhomie who always needed examples : 'narrow minds need examples.' As soon as he has quitted Rulhière, he amuses himself by applying to the latter his own method, and in passing a judgment on him which contains a grain of criticism and irony.

¹ Letter to Naigeon on a passage in one of Horace's Satires.

Rulhière did not by the way belong to Diderot's way of thinking, and he has explained his views somewhere very clearly. We may distinguish three great philosophical influences in the eighteenth century : that of Voltaire, that of Rousseau, and that of the Encyclopedists properly speaking. Rousseau, who is divided from the Encyclopedists by certain beliefs and by a show of stricter morality, is no less divided from Voltaire in that he aims at deep political reforms by means of the people, by appealing to common logic, to universal opinion. Voltaire, quite an aristocrat on the contrary, appeals only to the few, and the reform he preaches to kings, to the great and to the intellectual élite, is civil and religious rather than political. Rulhière attached himself to Voltaire's view ; and, wiser and more consequent than the master, he never drew back through imprudence or petulance. He had *liberal* ideas, as we should say, but he wished them to be tried and gradually applied by Governments and not by the people. He was faithful to the last to these views and, whatever side we may take in judging him, he deserves our esteem at least by his consistency of conduct and attitude.

His fortunes received a rude check after the fall of the Choiseul Ministry, and under Aiguillon's Ministry. His historian's pension was suppressed for a time. Chамfort, then his friend, condoled with him, and Rulhière replied in a verse Epistle which is rather long, but in which he expounds with facility his principles of philosophy and wisdom, which are no other than Horace's :

L'astre inconstant sous lequel je suis né,
Des biens aux maux m'a souvent promené ;
Mais aux evenemens plavant mon caractère,
En jouissant de tout, rien ne m'est nécessaire.
Dès que j'ai vu l'esperance me fuir,
J'ai suspendu ma course volontaire,
J'ai dans un sort nouveau pris un nouveau plaisir,
Et mon repos force devient un doux loisir.
Heureux par cette humeur sagement inconstante,
C'est la facilité qui m'invite et me tente. . . .

It was about this time that Rulhière was appointed, without any solicitation on his part, Secretary to Monsieur, brother of Louis XVI (afterwards Louis XVIII). Voltaire wrote to congratulate him on this occasion (August 1774) : ' It seems to me that an epoch is at

last beginning to form, and, if only Monsieur will inter-
est himself in it, good taste will subsist in France.' We
see how ready Voltaire was to make everything depend
upon the Great and Princes. It is natural by the way in
Monsieur to show favour to Rulhière, who was so good at
pointing and salting an epigram and even, when called upon,
a licentious tale, both favourites of the future monarch.

Before coming to his serious works, we will record some
of Rulhière's conversations, and this time with or about
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They form one of the curious
traits in Rulhière's life, and one of the most striking testi-
monies to Jean-Jacques' madness. We will not refuse it.

Rulhière lodged near the Tuileries. One morning in 1771, he had just returned from a ball (it was nine o'clock in the forenoon), when his friend Dusaulx called in, looking quite perturbed. The latter, the translator of Juvenal, enthusiastic, expansive, fed upon all the sentimentality of the age, had thrown himself very much in Jean-Jacques' way, and the latter at first took a liking to him and became exceptionally intimate with him. But soon he became suspicious, and there was a rupture ; the excellent man is deeply hurt by a letter he has just received from Rousseau, in which the latter writes : ' You are deceiving me, Sir ; I know not with what end, but you are deceiving me. . . .' To this Dusaulx replied with a letter full of apostrophes and effusions : ' If thou who wast so dear to me couldst go back to the source of thy prejudices ! . . . I call thee to witness, Jean-Jacques, in the name of the truth that thou bearest in thy heart, etc., etc.' But before sending the letter, tormented with perplexities, he thought it advisable to show it to his neighbour Rulhière, and it was for that purpose that he came to wake him at that *unseasonable* hour, nine o'clock in the morning. Dusaulx gives an interesting account of this conversation with Rulhière :

" . What is troubling you so early in the morning, or who ? " " It is our mutual friend, Jean-Jacques." -- " Bon ! has he not yet given you your congé ? " -- " That only holds by a thread ; here, read our correspondence, and you will see. "

Rulhière begins to read Rousseau's letters aloud, interrupting himself every moment, speaking to himself approvingly, saying : ' Good ! . . . splendid ! . . . but this is as good as gold ! . . .' Dusaulx could not under-

stand this approval, and Rulhière had to explain. The explanation was that Rulhière knew his Jean-Jacques so well by heart, that he recognised him at every line, in his suspicions, in his reproaches :

'Knowing our friend's character and ways so thoroughly, that I could, if need were, act as his private secretary and replace him in his absence, I was only thinking, when reading your correspondence, of what he should, from my data, have said and written to you ; and I guessed so correctly, that I congratulated myself. Would you not have done the same ?'

And when Dusaulx asks his advice and opinion about it all, Rulhière replies : 'What do I think ? Zounds ! I was thinking that here was some good, some excellent material for my comedy.' This comedy was *Le Méfiant*, which never saw the light. But we feel that Rulhière was just the man to write a comedy of this kind in the style and the taste of the *Méchant*.

However Dusaulx, quite concerned about his letter, insisted upon knowing whether he should send it :

'Not on any account !' exclaimed Rulhière ; you would make him a hundred times more mad with your *Plutarchian* letter. And besides, it is well that you should know that *he is never so strong as when he is in the wrong*.'

I can only refer those who wish to know more about the conversation to Dusaulx' account.¹ Rulhière, still thinking of his comedy subject, as the other was thinking of his letter, continues to define Jean-Jacques and to point out to Dusaulx what a vain and fanciful idea (in the form of enthusiasm) it is on his part to expect to comfort such a man :

'But, honestly, what can you expect of a man who has come to suspect his own dog (this is a fact), and that because the poor brute had become, like you, too affectionate, and he thought there must be some mystery at the bottom of it'

And he tells Dusaulx the story of the sparrows that Rousseau fed every morning with bread-crumbs on his window-sill, flattering himself that he had tamed them :

'I thought I had reason to believe, said Rousseau speaking through Rulhière, that we were the best friends in the world : not a bit of it, they were no better than men. I try to caress them, and behold my giddy friends flying off as if I were a bird of prey. I dare swear that they had not gone two streets away from my house, when they said worse than hanging about me.'

¹ *De mes rapports avec Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, by Dusaulx, p. 177 ff.

From this last rather exaggerated touch we might imagine it was already the Rousseau of the comedy that was speaking.

Once in the swing, Rulhière relates how he himself had hitherto kept his footing with Jean-Jacques ; not with flattery, but rather with rudeness, by laughing at him, by asking him deliberately, when he began to speak about the wicked : 'Do you mean to say that you believe in the wicked ? that is like being afraid of one's shadow.' But even Rulhière has lost his hold upon him. The last time he went to see Jean-Jacques, the latter received him grumbly and stood on the defensive all the time :

'I ring the bell, he opens to me : "What do you want here ? If you have come to dine, it is too soon ; if you have come to see me, it is too late." Then, thinking better of it, "Come in, I know what you want, and I have nothing to hide . . . even from you."

And Rousseau, addressing his housekeeper, purposely enters into a thousand details about the kitchen and the pot-au-feu ; then turning to Rulhière :

'Now you know all about the secrets of my house, and I defy all your sagacity to find in them anything suitable to your comedy.' -- He did not suspect, adds Rulhière, that he had just provided me with the best points.'

And when the visitor did not leave soon enough :

'"Good evening, Sir ; go and finish your *Défiant*." -- "I will obey you, but excuse . . . my dear Jean-Jacques, should we say *défiant et méchant* ? for an able grammarian, M. Domergue, has made me doubtful on the point." -- "Whichever you please, Sir, whichever you please ; good evening."

The whole scene is very amusingly told ; it does more honour however to Rulhière's wit than to his heart, and he himself appears throughout in the light of a man who is always too evidently on the look out for points and embellishments for the work he is composing. He is tracking his subject ; he thinks of nothing else, except perhaps of showing his cleverness, and making the man he is talking with lightly feel his claws. A true comic dramatist, an author of verve and frank humour, a Molière, or simply a Regnard, are not subject to these conceits or these epigrammatic subtleties, which form an essential part of Rulhière's character and habit of mind. This conversation with Dusaulx and his other conversa-

tion with Diderot give us a perfect idea of him from the social point of view.

I have touched upon his weak point : I will sum him up : Rulhière is not content with being clever, he prides himself on it, he makes a *profession* of his cleverness.

And this explains one point where he differs from Chamfort. Seeing the latter lean and sickly, and Rulhière on the contrary fresh and florid, somebody said in revenge for their epigrams (it was La Harpe repeating a *mot* of the Abbé Arnaud, which he put into poor rhymes) :

Connaissez-vous Chamfort, c' maigre bel-esprit ?
Connaissez-vous Rulhière, à l'ébouie ?
Tous deux se nourrissent d'envie ;
Mais l'un en meurt, et l'autre en vit.

This word *envy* which was applicable to Chamfort did not properly fit Rulhière. We have just seen and heard him, he is not envious, he is contented. The eccentricities and manias of his neighbour are merely fair game to him. He delights in pursuing and discovering them ; far from being angered by them, he welcomes them as an occasion for showing his cleverness. He is a curioso. He enjoys his malice and does not suffer from it.

About the same period Rulhière might have discovered some signs of that suspicious character which he was observing, in a younger Rousseau, equally infected with the malady of suspicion, in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, of whom he had seen a good deal in Russia. There is nothing to prove that he was guilty, towards this susceptible and umbrageous man of talent, of the folly and injustice which M. Aimé-Martin imagines. In a letter to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Rulhière shows himself grieved at his suspicions and complains of them in an affectionate tone. In another letter, written at the moment when Bernardin was starting for the Île de France, Rulhière writes to raise his courage.

* If you do not, my dear friend, make the fortune I expect of your talent and your soul, you will at least write a good Journal (a *Journal of Travels*), and that is something. We may find comfort for the reverses of this present existence in the thought that posterity will do us more justice. Make a good picture of all the inhabitants of our globe ; make yourself interesting to the men of all countries, and, whatever happens, you will at least have the resource of immortality.'

This immortality was indeed Bernardin's resource. The *Journal* of the voyage to the Ille de France was not a great matter, but *Paul et Virginie* was at the end of it. In advising him to take this noble revenge on destiny, Rulhière showed that he was worthy of comprehending and embracing the lofty idea.

He took rank as an historian and an honourably serious writer in 1788 by his *Eclaircissements historiques sur les causes de la Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes et sur l'état des Protestants en France*. This work had been demanded of Rulhière by the Ministry to support the benevolent views of Louis XVI in favour of the Protestants ; it was a question of restoring to them their civil status. M. de Breteuil shared with Malesherbes the honour of carrying out this work of justice and reparation. Rulhière, in his ingenious and learned work, investigated the causes and circumstances which had brought about the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685. Having access to the official manuscript sources, he used them with ability and art. Prompted by the natural bent of his mind as much as by the interest of the cause he was taking in hand, he endeavoured, by means of some artful and perhaps forced comparisons, to refer this great action, which was the error of a whole century, to certain accidental secondary causes, and to lessen the original intention ; this was a way of making the reparation easier and more acceptable to all. In our present more advanced state of knowledge on the seventeenth century, we are forced to admit that this fatal Revocation, which was directly occasioned by Louis XIV's final pious phase, had long pre-existed, or at least had been floating in the mind of that prince in the state of a political project, and that in the end he was only realising an old wish, which was insensibly seconded and encouraged by an almost universal complicity. But Rulhière's *Eclaircissements*, though incomplete and to a certain extent biased, were nevertheless very useful at the time they appeared, and are still one of the interesting documents to be consulted in the study of that great historical question.

In this work Rulhière shows himself in the true line of progress which he readily followed, in the path of reforms which public opinion called for and which the Government itself was directing. But soon, this directing power

dropping from the hands of the rulers, the whole of society entered into one of those profound agitations of which no clairvoyant mind could foresee either the term or the crises. Rulhière, besides being warned by his personal interest, was from the beginning one of these clairvoyant minds. He had nothing more to desire in life. A man of letters, he entered the Academy in 1787 with a Discourse that showed a superiority of views and a perfect elegance, and was universally applauded. A man of the world, he frequented all societies and was on a familiar footing with all the highest at Court. His fortune, which had a momentary check under the Aiguillon Ministry, had recovered since with every advantage through the protection of M. de Breteuil. Since 1775 he had been a Chevalier of Saint-Louis. He had built himself near Saint-Denis a country house for study and humble delights, which he called the Hermitage. From his garden he could see the Abbey of Saint-Denis which reminded him of human greatness and death; he had erected a little fountain whose waters warned him of the flight of time, and which was surmounted by a statue of Cupid. One day when the Comtesse d'Egmont came to see him, he placed this delicate inscription under the statue :

Églé parut sur cette rive ;
Une image de sa beauté
Se refléchit dans cette eau fugitive ;
L'image a fu, l'Amour seul est resté.

We may imagine that, sober and without any passions, satisfied and disillusioned, Rulhière did not witness without a deep impression the great commotion which shook society and every existence. He died in time, and suddenly, at Paris, on the 30 January 1791, at the age of fifty-six years and a half, according to some, of over sixty, according to others, and, in any case, not looking his age.

Among the places and prerogatives that Rulhière possessed there was a sinecure which is too singular not to be noted; he had or was soon to have had the government of the *Samaritaine*, which was worth five or six thousand livres. Now, the *Samaritaine* was nothing more nor less than the fountain-pump which had been erected under Henri IV on the Pont-Neuf, and intended to supply the Louvre, the gardens of the Tuilleries and the Palais-Royal

with water. •This fountain, with its front towards the bridge, amused the passers-by with its little cascade and its figures in gilt bronze of Jesus Christ and the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. The royal intention of this structure accounted for its being dignified with the name of a *government*, and having a very respectable remuneration attached to it. It needed only this last fact to prove that Rulhière had every reason for being only an indifferent revolutionary.

But his best reasons still lay in his character and the turn of his mind, which might be defined as *Liberal but Ministerial* at all times.

The regrets caused by Rulhière's death among those who enjoyed his society, show clearly enough that we should not accept literally the reputation for spitefulness which some have tried to put upon him ; he must have slandered himself by his liking and talent for sarcasm. But everything in the course of his life and conduct seems to indicate the gentleman socially speaking. 'Men of wit sometimes indulge in bons mots,' he said, 'but it is only fools that say spiteful things.'

More than fifteen years had elapsed since Rulhière's death, when in 1806 Napoleon, having formed designs on Poland and against Russia, thought his purpose would be helped by the publication of the manuscript work that Rulhière had left, and which bore the title : *Histoire de l'Anarchie de Pologne et du Démembrement de cette république*. The editing was entrusted to Daunou, who accomplished his task with the care and scrupulousness that he brought to all his labours and duties. This history of Rulhière's, so important and yet incomplete, does the greatest honour to his memory, and confirms our opinion of him as an able writer of a serious turn of mind who was not to be absorbed by elegant frivolities. Does this history however deserve, as Daunou maintained and Chênier repeated after him, to be ranked among the modern monuments that are comparable to those of the Ancients ? I will only venture upon a few doubts and a few observations on the subject.

Rulhière, commissioned in 1768 to write the History of anarchy in Poland, the anarchy which first broke out at that epoch, the consequences of which however were prolonged until the last dismemberment of Poland, con-

summated in 1797, had to do with a subject that was not defined, that was, if we may say so, in course of execution, and that he could not consequently embrace in its entirety. The whole composition of his work suffers from this first want of point of view. If he had wished only to write Memoirs, to compose a narrative based on conversations, despatches, confidences of various kinds, he could have done so: but that was not his purpose; he really desired to compose a classical, definitive history in the antique manner, of learned and majestic proportions: now, the premature and still unaccomplished subject did not lend itself to such treatment. The frame was still undefined. The painter therefore dilated into preambles to an excessive degree; to approach his subject, he seems to be waiting until it has a dénouement, and this dénouement is continually receding. At times we do not know whether he is tracing the history of Russia or that of Poland, so often does he at first carry us alternatively from one country to the other. When he at length attacks his real theme, which begins with the election of King Stanislas Poniatowsky, Rulhière suffers under the disadvantage of having to pronounce judgment on living characters that have not yet reached their full development, on persons who have not yet said their last word. He misjudges the greatness and the *consistency* of Catherine's plans, he is unable to penetrate those of the great Frederick, and his share of initiative in the destinies of Poland. He chooses for his heroes those among the Polish leaders who did not afterwards sustain that character: he sees them from a distance in the chivalric poses they assume, and all to their advantage. With some talent he ascribes to them speeches which recall those of the Ancients in their public assemblies, but I should have preferred some of those true words which carry us into reality. Dumouriez was for some time an agent of the French Ministry among those Poles, the confederates of Barr. What he tells me about them in his cursory and brightly familiar manner, is more instructive and impressive than the dramatic and somewhat external scenes of Rulhière, who, whilst warning us of his heroes' ostentation, is himself taken in by it. He wants to paint, and he looks about him for subjects for his paintings, just as we saw him looking about elsewhere

for subjects for his comedies and epigrams. The workmanship is evident. In a word, Rulhière conceives and executes his history much more like a man of letters and a painter than as a statesman and politician. It is a history which, in spite of its being so contemporaneous, does not appear to be sufficiently near to the sources, which savours too much of composition, or, if you prefer it, of the palette. Although it called forth objections in the Institute from practical men who had seen Poland or Russia, we can quite understand why it was so acceptable to Daunou, an ornate mind, more academical than he thought, who did not approve of history, even true history, being written *anyhow*.

In his analysis of Rulhière's merits Daunou went so far as to remark that, in his short as in his longest sentences, the author continually varies his *tone*, his *rhythm*, his *constructions* and *movements*:

'There are books, he adds ingeniously and like a consummate rhetorician, in which most of the sentences resemble more or less, if I may be pardoned the comparison, a series of verses set to the same tune; and it requires some effort in a writer to guard against this defect; for the mind only too easily accustoms itself to the same methods, the style to the same forms, the ear to the same numbers. But when, in reading Rulhière, we are able to take away our attention sufficiently from the profound interest of the matter to observe only the structure of the language, we are struck everywhere by the rich variety in the *numbers* which conduce to the general harmony. After this, I will admit that his style is ordinarily periodic (Rulhière had been blamed for his too lengthy sentences), that is to say what it should be in order to represent by the linking of expressions the connexion of ideas, to bring together and unfold the circumstances of great events, and to preserve to history its splendour and dignity.'

I desired to quote this passage from Daunou's reply to the objections raised up against Rulhière, to show the kind of care and attention, unusual in the Moderns, which that elegant historian devoted to the composition of his pictures. We shall always read with pleasure in Rulhière some curious and salient portraits, the description of Warsaw at the opening of the Electoral Diet, the scenes of magnificent tumult and confusion which he unfolds before us like a play. But those who like a greater explicitness will not be satisfied with this aspect of rather distant colouring, and will wonder what there is at the back of that immense canvas. Rulhière too much dis-

guises his researches, and he forces the doubter to recommence them.

There remains to him at least the honour of a great attempt. He conceived a vast historical composition, he began its execution and continued it through more than eleven books with facility, harmony and breadth. This man of the world, who appeared to be merely an epicurean man of wit, showed that he was able to set before himself a high aim, and to keep it in view with art and all his powers.

Where is the historian who is able to unite the beauty and purity of form of the Ancients in all matters, with the depth of researches expected of the Moderns, and can we hope to see him henceforth? Rulhière conceived the idea: that is his glory, and, although his course was not fully run, it is for that that we greet him to-day. *

NOTES

Page 1, line 10. See Sainte-Beuve's previous article on Jasmin in *Portraits Contemporains*, III, page 64.

Page 2, line 18. *The Blind Girl of Castel-Cudle* was translated by Longfellow.

Page 4, line 8. *Jocelyn*, a long poem in Lamartine's decadent style.

Page 4, line 9 from bottom. 'Just so much ground that they may stroll around its borders, recognise their vine-shoots and count their shrubs.'

Page 18, line 7. See the article on Mirabeau and La Marek in the sixth volume of the present translation, page 79.

Page 22, middle. See the article on the Duc de Lauzun in the sixth volume of the present translation, page 228.

Page 24, line 15. 'By her gait was revealed the true goddess.'

Page 38, line 4 from bottom. Réaumur, best known in connexion with the thermometer, studied a wide range of subjects, and left a voluminous work on Insects.

Page 60, line 16 from bottom. *An Agnes*, i.e. a simpleton; see Mohère, *L'âle des Femmes*.

Page 61, middle. 'La pauvre femme !' See Mohère, *Tartufe*, Act I, scene 4.

Page 63, last lines. Sainte Beuve's article on the Correspondence between Mme de Maintenon and the Princesses des Ursins will appear in the ninth volume of the present translation.

Page 66, line 14 from bottom. On Camille Desmoulins and the *Vieux Cordelier*, see the fourth volume of the present translation, page 79.

Page 76, line 14 from bottom. On the Duchesse d'Angoulême, see the article which will appear in the eighth volume of the present translation.

Page 81, line 4. 'As if, at this early age, inhuman Fortune had resolved to nurture me on trouble and sadness.'

Page 82, middle. 'Adorable to look at, you would think her a Divinity: such grace in her countenance, so regal a majesty!'

Page 90, line 5. *Grace of state*, i.e. a special favour of God, which fits us for a particular state or situation.

Page 95, line 9 from bottom. 'However hideous the mask that covers thee, Sicyes, I still doubt, and desire enlightenment!'

Page 112, line 4 from bottom. Drouot, Napoleon's famous General, called the Sage of the Grand Army. See the first volume of the present translation, page 190.

Page 113, line 3. Guillaume Budé (1467–1540), a famous Hellenist, who helped to found the Collège de France.

Page 118, line 8, etc. North's translation of Amyot's Plutarch, slightly altered. The expression 'pluck down the haughty stomachs' is North's; Amyot has *adoucir*.

Page 153, line 7 from bottom. 'Fools are taught by experience.'

Page 154, line 20. The *peasant of the Danube* lectures the Roman Senate on their avarice and injustice. See La Fontaine's fable *Le Puyson du Danube*.

Page 167, last line. On Ducis, who worshipped and murdered Shakespeare in all good faith, the reader may be referred to the sixth volume of the *Causées du Lundi* (original). He was better than his reputation. Bouilly was a writer for the young.

Page 168, line 10 from bottom. The Académie des Jeux Floraux was founded at Toulouse in 1323, for the culture of poetry.

Page 172, middle. 'Every complexion of life, condition, fortune, became Aristipus, aiming at a higher rank, but usually content with his present lot.' Horace, *Ep.* I, 17.

Page 182, line 6 from bottom. 'See how with us man has fallen from his primitive state!'

'In the dress of the savage, long hair.'

Page 183, line 13. 'What! I could not love thee without the assistance of this man in black!'

Page 183, line 17. 'Here is a young man who will write as they did a century ago.'

Page 185, line 12. 'A king who is loved and revered has subjects in every clime : he may travel the world over, and still be in his States.'

*Page 187, middle. The *metromaniac* during the first performance of his play, in Piron's comedy *La Métromanie*.

Page 191, middle. 'It remains stored away in the depths of my mind.' Virg., *En.* I, 26.

Page 191, line 12 from bottom. 'The rose has its poisons, which we find in the end.'

Page 206, line 15 from bottom. 'The inconstant star under which I was born, has often led me from good to evil fortune ; but by adapting myself to circumstances, though I am able to enjoy everything that falls in my way, I have no necessities. As soon as I saw hope flee from me, I arrested my voluntary course, I have taken a new pleasure in a new lot, and my forced repose becomes sweet leisure. Happy through this wisely inconstant humour, it is ease that invites and tempts me. . . .'

Page 208, line 17. *Le Méchant*, a comedy by Gresset.

Page 210, line 11. 'Do you know Chamfort, that lean wit ? do you know Rulhière, with his chubby face ? they both feed on envy : but it is death to the one, and life to the other.'

Page 212, line 10 from bottom. 'Aglaia appeared on this bank ; an image of her beauty was reflected in this fugitive water ; the image fled, Love alone has remained.'

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